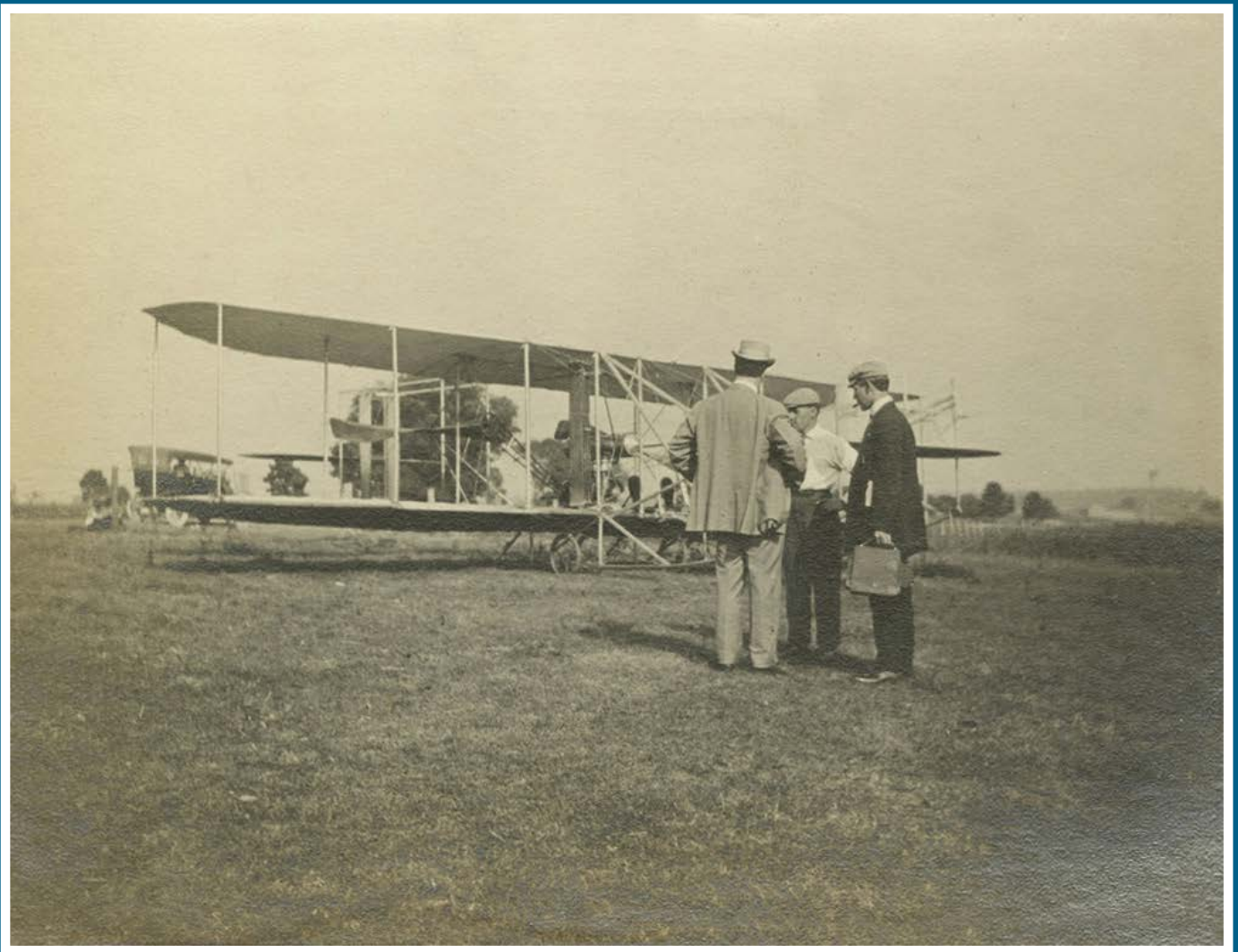




Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park: An Administrative History



Susan Ferentinos, with Hannah Craddock Mossman

Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park: An Administrative History

By Susan Ferentinos, with Hannah Craddock Mossman

Presented to Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park,
Interior Regions 3, 4, 5—Midwest Regional Office

Prepared under a cooperative agreement between
The Organization of American Historians and The National Park Service

September 2022

Cover Image:

NPS Media Gallery, Asset ID: 3A7002D3-1DD8-B71B-0BEC578CDB208793

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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September 2022

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List of Abbreviations

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
ADAAG	Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines
AFB	Air Force Base
AHF	Aviation Heritage Foundation
ATI	Aviation Trail, Inc.
CCC	Civilian Conservation Corps
CLR	Cultural Landscape Report
DAHC	Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission
DOI	US Department of the Interior
FY	Fiscal Year
GMP	General Management Plan
GMPA	General Management Plan Amendment
HABS/HAER	Historic American Building Survey/Historic American Engineering Record
HPFF	Huffman Prairie Flying Field
HPFFIC	Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center
HSR	Historic Structure Report
LRIP	Long-Range Interpretive Plan
MVRPC	Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission
MVRTA	Miami Valley Regional Transit Authority
MWRO	Midwest Regional Office
NAHA	National Aviation Heritage Area
NCR	National Cash Register
NHL	National Historic Landmark
NHP	National Historical Park
NPS	National Park Service
OHC	Ohio History Connection, formerly Ohio Historical Society
OHS	Ohio Historical Society, now Ohio History Connection
ONPS	Operations of the National Park Service
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Science and Cultural Organization
USAF	US Air Force
WDI	Wright Dunbar, Inc.
WDIC	Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center

- ① Wright Cycle Company and Visitor Center
- ② Paul Laurence Dunbar House State Memorial
- ③ Wright Company Factory
- ④ Wright Brothers Aviation Center
- ⑤ Hawthorn Hill
- ⑥ Huffman Prairie Flying Field and Interpretive Center



Park Map

Introduction

In the 1980s, a group of committed citizens in Dayton, Ohio, decided that the aviation history of their city was worth preserving and that designation as a unit of the National Park Service (NPS) was the best way to protect this history and bring economic benefit to Dayton. Their efforts were successful, and on October 16, 1992, Public Law 102-419 established Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park (NHP). From the beginning, management of the park and ownership of its cultural resources were shared among partners, and though the number of partners and the number of resources have both expanded since the park’s establishment, the overall structure of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP as a partnership park has continued.¹

The creation of the park’s administrative history is a time to pause and reflect on the first thirty years of Dayton’s only national park unit. The park’s establishment, planning and development, and first decades of operation are synopsized, so that trends, accomplishments, and ongoing struggles can emerge and guide management decisions at the park moving forward. This introduction to the report provides a brief overview of the park and provides a glimpse of what the rest of the report contains.

Park Purpose

The purpose of Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park is described in the park’s “Foundation Document” as follows:

The National Park Service and its partners at Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park interpret the lives and creations of Wilbur and Orville Wright and Paul Laurence Dunbar and preserve sites in the Dayton region associated with them as well as the early development of aviation.²

¹ “Aviation Trail Timeline/Sequence” (n.d.), folder 1, box 1, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections; “Public Law 102-419: To Establish the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park” (1992), <https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/102/419.pdf>.

² “Foundation Document: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park” (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, January 2017), 5, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library. Using slightly different wording, this purpose is stated in the 2018 Long-Range Interpretive Plan; Interpretive Solutions Inc., “Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Long-Range Interpretive Plan” (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, December 2018), 4.

Significance

The park’s significance statement, which also appears in the “Foundation Document,” provides additional detail, listing each of the resources included in the park along with its reason for inclusion:

1. Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park contains the only existing original buildings at their original locations—the fourth Wright Cycle Company, the print shop, and the Wright Co. factory—associated with the Wrights’ business careers that led to the invention of the first aeroplane.³
2. Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park contains the last home of internationally renowned poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, a residence that represents the level of success he attained from his writing career, which took place in an era of increasing racial segregation. The home was the first publicly administered site to commemorate an African American.
3. Huffman Prairie Flying Field is where the world’s first practical, piloted, heavier-than-air, power-driven and controlled aeroplanes were tested and proven and is considered the world’s first working airfield.
4. The Aviation Center within Carillon Historical Park contains the world’s first practical aeroplane, the 1905 Wright Flyer III.
5. Hawthorn Hill, the home of Orville Wright, his father, and his sister, represents the success he and Wilbur attained through the invention of the aeroplane—it was a retreat where he lived as he enjoyed the success and served a ceremonial role in the aviation community.
6. The Dayton region contains numerous historically significant sites directly related to the Wright brothers, Dunbar, or which contributed to the development of early aviation.⁴

Although this list focuses on structures, each of the park’s resources has an accompanying cultural landscape that is incorporated into park planning and management. Furthermore, as a partnership park, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP owns very few of these resources. Most are owned by park partners: Aviation Trail, Inc., Dayton History, Ohio History Connection, and Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. The next section provides a brief description of each partnership, and Chapter 5, “Park Partners,” discusses each in more depth. The only cultural resources owned by the NPS in Dayton are the Wright Cycle Company, located next to the Hoover Block on South Williams Street, and the Wright print shop, located in the Hoover Block. The Hoover Block also houses part of the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center; the other part is located in the adjacent Aviation Trail Building (formerly the Setzer Building), owned by Aviation Trail, Inc.

³ Note that this numbered list is a direct quotation from the park’s “Foundation Document,” and this document uses the historical spelling “aeroplane.” “Foundation Document: Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP,” 6.

⁴ “Foundation Document: Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP,” 6.

Recurring Themes in Park History

This administrative history covers the usual aspects of park management—establishment, planning, resource management, interpretation and education, among others—and throughout these various discussions, certain themes come up repeatedly. These are the overriding characteristics of the park that have influenced management in all areas. These themes are:

1. The need to maintain healthy, productive relationships among all the park partners in order to get the work of the park accomplished.
2. The need to create a unified visitor experience at a park composed of seven noncontiguous sites, nearly all of which are owned by other cultural resource organizations that also need to create a unified visitor experience among their resources.
3. The need to stay relevant to local communities whose cultural memory of Dayton as a center of industry is fading.

Building Healthy Partnerships

As of 2022, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP is managed by five legislated partners: the National Park Service, Aviation Trail, Inc., Dayton History, Ohio History Connection, and Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

Aviation Trail, Inc. (ATI) oversees the Aviation Trail, a marketing effort to guide visitors to the Miami Valley’s various historic sites related to aviation. The original idea for Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP developed within this organization, and it is responsible for saving the Wright Cycle Company and the Hoover Block, which now comprise the park’s core parcel. Although ATI has been a vital friend of the park from the beginning, it did not become a legislated partner until October 24, 2000, when Public Law 106-356 expanded the park boundaries to include ATI’s Setzer Building, adjacent to the Hoover Block and now connected internally to form the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center (WDIC).⁵ ATI operates the Dave Gold Parachute Museum inside the WDIC, and the center serves as a visitor-orientation point for both the national park and the Aviation Trail.⁶

Dayton History was created in 2005 through the merger of the Montgomery County Historical Society and Carillon Historical Park. Carillon Historical Park was an original partner to Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. It owned and managed the 1905 Wright Flyer III and its exhibit space, now known as the John W. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers

⁵ “Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Amendments Act of 2000, H.R. 5036, 106th Cong.,” Pub. L. No. 106-356 (2000), <https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/106/356.pdf>.

⁶ Aviation Trail, Inc., “About Us,” accessed May 27, 2020, <https://www.aviationtrailinc.org>; “Aviation Trail Timeline/Sequence”; Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Amendments Act of 2000, H.R. 5036, 106th Cong.

National Museum, and these resources were included in the original legislation creating Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. When Carillon Historical Park became part of Dayton History, this larger organization became the park's partner for these resources. Dayton History also operates Hawthorn Hill, which was added to the park's boundaries in 2009. The house was owned at that time by the Wright Brothers Family Foundation, and Dayton History managed it as a historic site. The foundation transferred ownership to Dayton History in 2013.⁷

The Ohio History Connection, formerly the Ohio Historical Society, operated the Paul Laurence Dunbar House from the 1930s until 2009. As such, the organization was one of the park's original legislated partners. In 2009, the Great Recession forced the organization to divest itself from the management of state historic sites, including the Dunbar House. Dayton History became the park's management partner for the Dunbar House, handling daily operations of the site between 2009 and 2015. In 2015, the NPS began staffing the house, while Dayton History offered administrative assistance, custodial service, and routine maintenance. In 2021, the NPS took over all responsibility for the maintenance and operation of the site. The Ohio History Connection remains a park partner, representing the state of Ohio's ownership of the Dunbar property.⁸

Wright-Patterson Air Force Base (AFB) owns Huffman Prairie Flying Field, and so was one of the park's original legislated partners. In addition, the local Wright Brothers Memorial—not officially part of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP—and the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center lie within the base, accessible by a different base entrance than the flying field. Both are located on Wright Brothers Hill, overlooking the flying field.⁹

Clearly, with so many park partners, each possessing its own organizational culture, functioning relationships are at the heart of park management. Consensus-building, negotiation, and communication among partners thus are constant components of the history of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP.

⁷ Benjamin Kline, "Dayton History Launched," *Dayton Daily News*, August 25, 2005; Public Law 102-419: To establish the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park; "Public Law 111-11: Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009; Section 7117, Dayton Aviation Heritage Boundary Expansion" (2009), <https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/111/11.pdf>; Dayton History, "Hawthorn Hill," accessed April 5, 2020, <https://www.daytonhistory.org/visit/dayton-history-sites/hawthorn-hill/>; Thomas Gnau, "Dayton History Now Owns Wright Brothers Mansion," *Dayton Daily News*, June 28, 2013.

⁸ Public Law 102-419: To establish the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park; National Park Service, "Cooperative Agreement between the National Park Service and Dayton History," September 14, 2016, 1-4, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Staff Records; Ohio History Connection, "Paul Laurence Dunbar House," accessed May 27, 2020, <http://ohiohistory.org/visit/museum-and-site-locator/paul-laurence-dunbar-house>.

⁹ Public Law 111-11: Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009; Section 7117, Dayton Aviation Heritage Boundary Expansion.

Creating a Unified Visitor Experience

Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's resources are scattered throughout the Dayton metropolitan area. The core parcel, composed of the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center and the Wright Cycle Company, is located in West Dayton, a little over a mile from the city center. The Paul Laurence Dunbar House is also in West Dayton, a half-mile northwest of the core parcel. Carillon Historical Park, which is the location of the 1905 Wright Flyer III and the John W. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers National Museum, lies east of the Great Miami River and south of downtown Dayton, three miles from the core parcel. Hawthorn Hill is located outside of the city, in the southeast suburb of Oakwood, and is only accessible to visitors by way of a shuttle van from Carillon Historical Park. Huffman Prairie Flying Field and the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center are both located on Wright-Patterson AFB, northeast of the city in Greene County. While not yet open to the public, the Wright Company factory lies in an industrial sector of West Dayton about a mile-and-a-half west of the park's core parcel.

Even with a preexisting familiarity with the city of Dayton, maneuvering among park sites takes a fair bit of effort, and for out-of-town visitors, this task could easily prove daunting. Facilitating visitors' ability to circulate among parts of the park has been an ever-present concern for park management. Letting visitors know when they've reached their intended destination has been another concern. With so many different organizations managing the park sites, consistent signage, naming, and branding has demanded a surprising amount of park time and energy.

Furthermore, to truly ensure a uniform visitor experience, interpretation at each site must be of the same quality and ideally, in a style compatible with the other sites. The full story of the Wright brothers and Dunbar must be divided among relevant units of the park, so that the various components are not just repeating the same information over and over. These goals can be difficult to achieve while also respecting each partner's autonomy and preferred interpretive methods. And to complicate the issue even more, the Ohio History Connection, Dayton History, and Wright-Patterson AFB are all responsible for other cultural resources that do not fall within park boundaries. Like Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, each of these organizations needs to create a unified visitor experience across their sites as well. These complex needs have had an impact on an array of management areas, from interpretation and visitor services to resource management and park planning.

Maintaining Park Relevance

Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was established with the hope (at least on the part of local advocates) that it would be an economic generator for a city that at the end of the twentieth century had lost most of its industrial base. Local park supporters believed that the park's core parcel would also serve as an anchor for the revitalization of a section of the city that

was suffering economically. Initial park development also took place in an era when the National Park Service was reassessing its relationship with the public and pushing its units and programs to increase their relevance to *all* Americans, not just the agency's traditional base of middle-class, white, heteronormative families.

Within this context, the park has had to be many things to many people. It must honor Dayton's history as a center of aviation, while also being relevant to residents of a twenty-first-century city that has not yet completely established its post-industrial identity. Only 12.4 percent of Dayton residents are age sixty-five or older (2018 figures), meaning only 12.4 percent have adult memory of the mid-1970s when the upper Midwest's industrial fortunes were already in swift decline. The 2014–18 median household income in Dayton was \$31,395 (2018 dollars), nearly *half* the national average of \$60,293. This is a local audience that may well have difficulty relating to a park that commemorates a history of innovation and entrepreneurial spirit.¹⁰

The issue of relevance, while always in the background, was not the park's primary concern during its first ten years. The centennial of the Wright brothers' first flight took place in 2003, and that meant that the park spent its first decade preparing for this nationwide event, which was expected to bring 300,000 to 400,000 visitors to the park in its first year of full operation.¹¹ The original civic boosters who had advocated for the park—who related to the history of aviation and had living memory of Dayton's industrial glory days—remained active in park planning and advocacy. Park management, partners, and stakeholders worked together to ensure that Dayton's contribution to flight would not be forgotten. In the park's second decade, after the centennial was over, programming and outreach expanded beyond the traditional technological story, to encompass a greater range of potential audiences.

¹⁰ US Census Bureau, "QuickFacts: Dayton City, Ohio," 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/daytoncityohio>; US Census Bureau, "QuickFacts: United States," July 1, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219>.

¹¹ The Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretative Center opened on December 17, 2002, the start of the centennial year, and the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center opened in mid-2003. As such, this report considers the centennial year to be the park's first year of full operation, though its various cultural resources were open to the public during the park's first decade.



Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park sign in front of the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center, February 8, 2018. Image: Susan Ferentinos.

Organization of This Report

This administrative history of Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park provides an overview of thirty years of operation at a park with many partners and multiple noncontiguous sites. It seeks to map out the trends, changes, and larger historical context in which to understand specific decisions.

We begin with that historical context. Chapter 1, “Dayton,” places Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP within the history of the city it commemorates. This chapter describes the realities of the city and the core parcel’s West Dayton neighborhood at the time of park establishment. Chapter 2, “The Federal Government in the Post-Industrial City,” looks at the park within the wider context of its governing agency, the National Park Service. Analyzing the agency’s larger goals provides a unique perspective on how Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP fits into the agenda and history of America’s most-loved federal agency. The NPS goals that are most important for understanding Dayton Aviation

Heritage NHP are the agency's efforts to become more relevant to twenty-first-century visitors by creating urban parks, diversifying the stories told, and fostering a culture of collaboration with outside entities.¹²

Once we have established the larger historical context in which to understand the park, we move into specifics. The next four chapters provide a backstory and account for the park's early years. Chapter 3, "The Beginnings of Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park," looks at how the idea of a national park unit devoted to the city's aviation history developed. This chapter also details the National Park Service's initial investigations into that possibility. Chapter 4, "Becoming a National Historical Park" considers public response to the idea of a national park unit, then continues on to recount the legislative history of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. Chapter 5, "Park Partners," offers background on the park's partner organizations, detailing both their histories before park establishment and their relationships with the NPS since Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP became a reality. Chapter 6, "Commemorating a Century of Flight," explores the wider landscape of Wright brothers commemoration. Beginning with the 1940 completion of Dayton's local Wright Brothers Memorial and moving through to the creation of the Dayton Aviation Heritage Area and the placement of Dayton aviation sites on the US Tentative List of World Heritage Sites, this chapter places Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP within a larger context of commemoration. The 2003 Century of Flight centennial celebration of the Wright brother's first flight is a particular focus of this chapter.

From there, we move onto considering more fundamental elements of national park management. Chapter 7, "Park Management," reflects on the park's history through the lens of its superintendents, William Gibson, Lawrence Blake, and Dean Alexander. Kendell Thompson became park superintendent in 2018 and continues to serve in that capacity at the time of this writing (2022). Highlights from the early years of his tenure are also included in this report, but the next administrative history of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, commissioned decades from now, would do well to begin with Thompson's arrival at the park, in order to capture a historical perspective not possible in 2022. Chapter 8, "Cultural Resource Management," provides a history of each of the park's cultural resources before their incorporation into Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, as well as a discussion of their preservation and management since the park has been in existence. Chapter 9, "Interpretation and Education," considers the park's overall approach to interpreting the stories of the Wright brothers and Dunbar and discusses the challenges involved in having interpretation handled by different organizations at different sites within the park. Chapter 10, "Serving the Visitors," offers information on the park's

¹² National Park Service Stewardship Institute, "Urban Agenda: Call to Action Initiative" (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, March 2015), 3, https://www.nps.gov/subjects/urban/upload/UrbanAgenda_web.pdf.

Introduction

visitation and average visitor, then considers visitor issues that have been ongoing themes in the park's history: outreach to the park's varied audiences; facilitating visitors' access to multiple park units; and making the park accessible to all, including those with disabilities.

* * *

Taken as a whole, the history of Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park has many things to say about various aspects of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century United States. In the first thirty years of the park's existence, deindustrialization shifted from economic crisis to a phenomenon requiring historical analysis; US cities grew increasingly dependent on tourism as an economic anchor; growing political discord led to frequent government shutdowns; the country engaged in at least two culture wars over "whose history matters" in a multicultural society; and the effects of climate change—accelerated, in part, by the expansion of commercial flight—became increasingly difficult to deny. The nation also experienced its deadliest terrorist attack (2001) and a life-threatening pandemic (2020–). All of these historical trends and events played out in specific ways at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, and the story of how the park balanced day-to-day operations with these momentous cultural shifts is the subject of this report.

CHAPTER ONE

Dayton

Aviation as Part of Dayton's Identity

Industry has been part of Dayton since its early years, and in the twentieth century, the aviation industry played a key role in the city's identity. Although Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, was the site of the Wright brothers' first powered flight, Dayton was their home, and many of the important developments that contributed to that first flight were achieved in this city. The Wright brothers began experimenting with the principles of flight in Dayton, and they covered much of the groundwork in their hometown before ever venturing to the Outer Banks of North Carolina. In addition, after that monumental first flight in North Carolina, the Wrights continued their efforts at Huffman Prairie Flying Field, just outside Dayton, and it was here where they perfected their invention.¹

The Wrights remained loyal to the city where they came of age. Amid international celebrity and eventual wealth, they chose to stay in Dayton. They ensured that the city would benefit from their invention as well. When negotiating the terms of the Wright Company with their New York investors, Orville and Wilbur succeeded in siting the factory in Dayton.² The brothers' association with Dayton also led to the establishment of Wilbur Wright Field during World War I, on the site of the original Huffman Prairie Flying Field, and its eventual evolution into Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in 1948.³

Dayton's association with the aviation industry continues into the twenty-first century. Wright-Patterson Air Force Base remains a center of aerospace research and development. Wright State University, named for the Wright brothers, has a program in aerospace systems engineering, a minor in air force studies, and a certificate in engineering and

¹ Janet R. Daly Bednarek and Michael H. Bednarek, *Dreams of Flight: General Aviation in the United States*, Centennial of Flight Series, no. 4 (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 4.

² Edward J. Roach, *The Wright Company: From Invention to Industry*, electronic resource (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014), 17–35; Timothy R. Gaffney, *The Dayton Flight Factory: The Wright Brothers and the Birth of Aviation* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2014), 93–98.

³ Lois E. Walker and Shelby E. Wickam, *From Huffman Prairie to the Moon: The History of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base* (Washington, DC: Air Force Logistics Command, 1986), 17–48.

innovation entrepreneurship.⁴ The University of Dayton offers training from the undergraduate to the PhD level in aerospace engineering.⁵ And in 2017, twenty-four of the nation's top thirty aircraft manufacturers had sites or offices located in the Dayton metropolitan area.⁶

The City of Dayton

Settlement of the land that is now Dayton began roughly ten thousand years ago. Since then, various cultures have dominated the area. First came cultures in the Archaic tradition, then the Woodland tradition, which included first the Adena culture and then the Hopewell culture. Beginning in the eighteenth century, control of the land was in flux. It was used for hunting by the Miami and the Shawnee, while being claimed by the French.⁷

This region entered the United States as part of the old Northwest Territory, established in 1787. Dayton itself was platted in 1796, after which European Americans began to settle the area. African Americans followed shortly after. In 1802, the first African American settler on record arrived in Dayton, a female servant of one Daniel Cooper. Slavery was illegal in the Northwest Territory, so this servant would have been a free laborer. Her son, Harry Cooper, born in 1803, was the first African American child to be born in Dayton. It is not known if Harry's mother had adopted Daniel Cooper's last name and passed it on to her son, or if Harry was the son of Daniel Cooper and his servant together.⁸

The town was used as a mobilization point for troops in the War of 1812, and it remained a transportation hub throughout the nineteenth century. Nine turnpikes passed through the town, as did the Miami and Erie Canal, completed in 1829. Dayton's development as an industrial center followed in tandem with its role as a transportation hub. As early as the 1810s, the town was home to a tobacco factory and multiple textile mills, and its first labor organization, the Mechanics' Association, was founded in 1813. By 1841, Dayton, now moving toward city status, had a total of 144 factories, including five flour mills, five sawmills, and four foundries. By the late nineteenth century, Dayton's primary industries were publishing, agricultural products, and the National Cash Register company, founded in 1884.⁹

⁴ Wright State University, "Degrees and Programs," 2021, <http://www.wright.edu/degrees-and-programs>.

⁵ "Program Listing," University of Dayton, 2021, <https://udayton.edu/academics/programs.php>.

⁶ Cecelia Salamone, "As Profits Soar Industrywide, Ohio Is a Top State for Aerospace Manufacturing," *Dayton Business Journal*, August 22, 2017, <https://www.bizjournals.com/dayton/news/2017/08/22/as-profits-soar-industrywide-ohio-is-a-top-state.html>.

⁷ Ann Honious, *What Dreams We Have: The Wright Brothers and Their Hometown of Dayton, Ohio* (Fort Washington, PA: Eastern National, 2003), 11–14.

⁸ Honious, 16, 20; "Dayton, Ohio," in *Ohio History Central* (Ohio History Connection, n.d.), https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Dayton,_Ohio; Margaret Peters, *Dayton's African American Heritage: A Pictorial History*, expanded 2nd ed. (Virginia Beach: Donning Co. Publishers, 2005), 12–13.

⁹ Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 23–25; "Dayton, Ohio."

Indeed, it was the publishing industry that first brought the Wright family to Dayton. In 1869, Milton Wright, Orville and Wilbur's father, moved the family to Dayton and began work at the United Brethren Publishing House, editing the church's official newspaper, the *Religious Telescope*. The following year, 1870, the city boasted a population of 30,473—548 of whom were of African descent. However, Dayton still lacked paved streets and a sewer system. Paved streets came to central Dayton—along with natural gas and electricity—in the 1880s, and sewer lines began in the 1890s. West Dayton, where the Wright family settled, was located across the Great Miami River from downtown, and in the 1870s, it was beginning to develop as a streetcar suburb.¹⁰

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Dayton earned a reputation as a model city among Progressive reformers.¹¹ The turn of the twentieth century was marked in the United States by significant political corruption, as ward politics and political bosses doled out public office to cronies in exchange for preferential treatment. Reformers sought an end to government corruption, and one idea to emerge from this era was the council-manager form of government. Under this system, a municipality is governed by a city council, who hire a city manager with expertise in administration to oversee the day-to-day functioning of the local government. This approach reduced the power of individual politicians and limited their ability to appoint unqualified associates to public positions.¹²

Dayton was an early adopter of the council-manager idea, thanks in part to the advocacy of John Patterson, founder of National Cash Register. Beginning in 1896, Patterson advocated for reform in Dayton through the implementation of this form of government.¹³ Patterson and his allies worked for nearly twenty years to realize their vision for Dayton city government, but it took the Dayton Flood of 1913 to convince the electorate to support the plan. In the aftermath of the disaster, Patterson led the relief efforts. The effect was a clear demonstration of “how one man versed in business methods could bring order out of chaos.” Simultaneously, the flood required the city to start over in many ways; the time seemed right to try a new form of community governance. Five months after the

¹⁰ Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 27–28; Peters, *Dayton's African American Heritage*, 15; Gaffney, *Dayton Flight Factory*, 14–15, 21–22.

¹¹ For a detailed account of Dayton in the Progressive era, see Judith Sealander, *Grand Plans: Business Progressivism and Social Change in Ohio's Miami Valley, 1890-1929*, electronic resource (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988).

¹² Jon C. Teaford, *Cities of the Heartland: The Rise and Fall of the Industrial Midwest*, *Midwestern History and Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 121–22; National League of Cities, “Cities 101—Forms of Municipal Government,” National League of Cities, 2022, <https://www.nlc.org/resource/forms-of-municipal-government>.

¹³ Patterson was also a leader in applying progressive ideals to the private sector. For more on his employee welfare efforts at National Cash Register, see Sealander, *Grand Plans*, chap. 2.

flood, in August 1913, Dayton voters approved the council-manager plan, making Dayton the first major US city to implement this Progressive idea. By 1920, 176 other US cities had followed suit.¹⁴

The 1913 flood also led to the creation of another progressive experiment, the Miami Conservancy District, the first watershed district in the country. In an effort to avoid such devastating floods in the future, the conservancy district built a series of dry dams along the Great Miami River and its tributaries and undertook a variety of other civic improvements related to flood control.¹⁵ In addition to being another example of Progressive-era innovation in the Dayton area, the Miami Conservancy District is also specifically relevant to Huffman Prairie Flying Field, now within the boundaries of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. The field lies within a potential floodplain of the Mad River dam, and this prevents the building of any permanent structures on this land.¹⁶

Amid these political reforms, Dayton continued to be an industrial center throughout the first half of the twentieth century, and in the early twentieth century, the city had the most patents per capita of anywhere in the nation. In the words of a recent news documentary, “It’s no exaggeration to say that Dayton was once the epitome of industry and ingenuity in the American Heartland.”¹⁷ Aviation, auto parts, and industrial components dominated manufacturing, and the economy fueled population growth during this period. The city’s population more than doubled between 1870 and 1890, from roughly 30,000 people to 61,220. By 1920, Dayton was the forty-third largest city in the United States, with a population of 152,559. A significant part of this growth came from African American migrants fleeing Jim Crow oppression in the South and seeking industrial jobs in northern cities. Between 1890 and 1920, the number of African American residents in Dayton grew *more than tenfold*, from 901 to 9,052. Over 50 percent of that increase occurred over the course of just ten years, 1910 to 1920.¹⁸

¹⁴ Teaford, *Cities of the Heartland*, 121–22, quote from 122; Sealander, *Grand Plans*, chap. 4.

¹⁵ “Miami Conservancy District,” in *Ohio History Central* (Ohio History Connection), accessed November 2, 2021, https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Dayton,_Ohio; Sealander, *Grand Plans*, chap. 4.

¹⁶ Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 201–12; Elizabeth Fraterrigo et al., *From Pasture to Runway: Huffman Prairie Flying Field, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Cultural Landscape Report, Landscape Implementation Plan, Interpretation Plan* (Omaha: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2002), 36–44; Jill O’Bright, David G. Richardson, and William S. Harlow, “Wright Cycle Company and Wright and Wright Printing,” National Historic Landmark Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1990), 8.8–8.9, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/71986526>.

¹⁷ *Frontline: Left Behind America* (PBS, 2018), <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/left-behind-america>.

¹⁸ “Dayton, Ohio”; Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 27; US Census Bureau, “Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1890,” 1998, <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab12.txt>; “Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1920,” US Bureau of the Census, 1998, <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab15.txt>; Peters, *Dayton’s African American Heritage*, 15.



The aftermath of the Dayton Flood of 1913; Ludlow Street, looking north.
Image: William F. Cappel, Dayton, Ohio, Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-17310.

Along with its population, the city continued to grow and expand its industrial base in the 1920s. Dayton established its first planning board in 1924 and instituted its first citywide zoning ordinance in 1926.¹⁹ In 1930, the planning board released a city plan to manage future growth and an accompanying brochure designed to explain “What the city plan is, what it is doing, and what it can do for you and your city.” Interestingly, in explaining the need for urban planning, the city plan brochure compared “the modern industrial city such as ours” to “the largest manufacturing plant,” creating a metaphor of management that presumably was chosen because the complexity of running a factory would have been familiar to many of the brochure’s intended readers, residents of Dayton.²⁰

The mid-twentieth century witnessed dramatic changes for American cities, Dayton included. In the words of urban historian Jon C. Teaford: “By the early 1960s the American city was something quite different from what it had been in 1945. Suburbia was gradually becoming the predominant element of metropolitan America, and the central

¹⁹ L. Segoe, “Dayton and Its City Plan: What the City Plan Is, What It Is Doing, and What It Can Do for You and Your City” (Dayton, OH: Plan Board, 1930), 2, 7, Planning Department Files, City of Dayton Records, Wright State University Special Collections.

²⁰ Segoe, 2.

city was declining. Schemes for central-city revival were commonplace, yet year after year both commerce and population migrated outward from the urban core, escaping from the anachronistic downtown and the decaying neighborhoods.”²¹

In the post–World War II era, President Eisenhower established the interstate highway system, increasing the ease with which people could travel from the center city to outlying suburbs and giving car travel a competitive advantage over public transportation systems.²² Federal housing policy favored new construction and single-family homes, both more common in the suburbs than in urban neighborhoods.²³ And as impoverished migrants, mostly African Americans, arrived in urban centers, middle-class European Americans increasingly left the city for surrounding suburbs, in a phenomenon known as “white flight.” This demographic shift further destabilized many US cities, as they lost a significant portion of their tax base, as federal transportation dollars went to building highways for suburban commuters instead of fixing urban streets, and as urban areas became linked with danger and crime in the white imagination.²⁴

All of these national trends played out in Dayton in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1960s, Dayton’s population declined for the first time since its settlement. In 1960, the population was 262,332, and Dayton remained in the top fifty largest US cities, at number forty-nine. However, the city lost about twenty thousand people between 1960 and 1970. By 1980, another forty thousand had left. The result was that Dayton went from being the forty-ninth largest city in the US in 1960 to the seventieth in 1980.²⁵

A 1963 “social profile” of the Dayton metropolitan area reported that the population of Greene and Montgomery counties (home of Dayton’s suburbs) was increasing by 15,000 annually.²⁶ Meanwhile, however, even though Dayton’s overall residency decreased by twenty thousand in the 1960s, the number of African American residents increased by seventeen thousand, suggesting that Dayton was experiencing demographic shifts similar to other US cities.

²¹ Jon C. Teaford, *The Twentieth-Century American City: Problem, Promise, and Reality*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 100.

²² Teaford, 101.

²³ Eric Avila and Mark H. Rose, “Race, Culture, Politics, and Urban Renewal: An Introduction,” *Journal of Urban History* 35, no. 3 (March 2009): 339–40, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144208330393>.

²⁴ Teaford, *The Twentieth-Century American City*, 99–153; Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

²⁵ “Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1960,” US Bureau of the Census, 1998, <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab19.txt>; “Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1970,” US Bureau of the Census, n.d., <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab20.txt>; “Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1980,” US Bureau of the Census, 1998, <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab21.txt>.

²⁶ James P. Dixon, “Social Profile of the Dayton Metropolitan Area” (Dayton, OH: Community Welfare Council of the Dayton Area, 1963), i, copy available in the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

The last half of the twentieth century brought challenging times for Dayton, as with other industrial cities. As a city heavily dependent on manufacturing, Dayton was hard hit by the national economy's shift away from industrial jobs, becoming part of the so-called Rustbelt and struggling to redefine itself in an era when it could not rely on manufacturing as a major source of civic identity. The economic challenges faced by the city as a whole fell even heavier on its most vulnerable populations, such as African Americans who were largely concentrated in West Dayton neighborhoods. The specific history of West Dayton, home originally to the Wright brothers and their companies and now the site of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's core parcel, is explored in the following section. After this, deindustrialization and its relevance to the city and to the creation of the park will be considered.

In 2013, Dayton had a population of 143,355, placing it at 179 in the list of largest US cities by population. And since that time, the population has continued to decline; it was at 140,407 in 2019. Of this number, 52.7 percent was European American, 39.0 percent was African American, 3.9 percent was Latinx, 3.5 percent was mixed-raced, and .9 percent was Asian or Asian American. Five percent of the population was foreign-born. Within the city, 32.1 percent of residents lived in poverty. These numbers look only at the area within the city limits; the population of the metropolitan area, including suburbs, is a little over 800,000. However, considering the metropolitan area as a whole can mask important information. For instance, the city and the suburbs have different tax bases, which mean they have different amounts available to fund infrastructure improvements, schools, and public safety.²⁷

²⁷ US Census Bureau, "QuickFacts: Dayton City, Ohio," 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/daytoncityohio>; "1000 Largest US Cities By Population With Geographic Coordinates," 2013, <https://public.opendatasoft.com/explore/dataset/1000-largest-us-cities-by-population-with-geographic-coordinates/>; Thomas Gnau, "Dayton Area Cities Growing Slowly, Census Estimates Show," *Dayton Daily News*, May 28, 2019, <https://www.daytondailynews.com/business/dayton-area-cities-growing-slowly-census-estimates-show/BnecFxneouffjVZzFDcN1O>.



Factory workers at the National Cash Register company factory in Dayton, 1942.
During World War II, NCR converted its plant to defense work.

Image: Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Images, Library of Congress, LC-USE6-D-003571.

Dayton's West Side

Located across the Great Miami River from the original platted town, the area now known as West Dayton was mainly farmland until shortly before the Wright family moved there in 1869. The same year as the Wright family's arrival, the Dayton Street Railroad Company began laying streetcar lines and soon connected West Dayton to the rest of the city. Once convenient transportation was available, West Dayton began developing as a neighborhood for families hoping to avoid the bustle of living in the city center. Still, West Dayton lacked many late-nineteenth-century amenities of urban living. Streets were not paved until the 1890s, and the neighborhood was not wired for electricity until after the 1913 flood.²⁸

²⁸ Gaffney, *Dayton Flight Factory*, 13; Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 42. Park ranger Bob Petersen has stated that some parts of West Dayton had electricity before the flood; see Bob Petersen, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Administrative History. However, I have chosen to use the information from Honious, who states that West Dayton did not have electricity until 1913.

In the late nineteenth century, this area of Dayton was occupied by a mix of working-class and professional families. The majority of residents were non-immigrant European Americans, but a sizable number of African American families also lived there, particularly near West Fifth Street. By 1910, in the midst of the Great Migration that brought upwards of six million African Americans to industrial cities outside the Deep South, 5 percent of the neighborhood's residents were African American.²⁹

In the early twentieth century, the demographics of West Dayton began to change. In 1898, Dayton Malleable Iron Works began recruiting Hungarians to come to Dayton and work in its factory, and the majority of the new immigrants settled west of the river, north of West Third Street. The iron works was located on West Third Street, just southeast of Paul Laurence Dunbar's house and northwest of the Wright family home on Hawthorne Street.³⁰ In this same era, the city's African American population exploded—increasing tenfold in the thirty years between 1890 and 1920—and a sizable number of these new arrivals settled in close proximity to West Fifth. With so many residents trying to get a foothold in their new city, West Dayton slowly became more working-class than its original characteristic of being socioeconomically mixed in the late nineteenth century.³¹

This change was only beginning when Paul Laurence Dunbar bought his house on North Summit Street, near West First Street, in 1903. At this time, Dunbar was at the height of his acclaim, and his home was a two-story structure of good-quality construction with high-end plumbing, sitting on a double lot. It was located in a middle-class, primarily European American section of the neighborhood, about a half-mile from the expanding African American commercial district around West Fifth Street.³²

Dayton's African American population continued to grow at dizzying rates. From a fivefold increase between 1910 and 1920, the population more than doubled between 1920 and 1940 (from 9,025 to 20,273) and nearly tripled between 1940 and 1960 (from 20,273 to 57,288). However, even though Dayton may have provided a better existence for African Americans than the southern states from where most migrated, it was by no means a racial utopia. Housing and job discrimination were widespread, causing the majority of African Americans to cluster together near West Fifth Street, where they could find housing that

²⁹ Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 175–76. The specific part of West Dayton that these numbers apply to is the area bounded by the alley south of West Third Street, West Fifth Street, and the alley just east of Horace Street. On the history of the Great Migration, see Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).

³⁰ Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 182; Edward Roach, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

³¹ Honious, 182; Peters, *Dayton's African American Heritage*, 15, 49.

³² Joseph S. Mendinghall, "Paul Laurence Dunbar House, Dayton, OH," National Register of Historic Places Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1977), 5; William Harlow, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

was available to them and safety in numbers. Even within West Dayton, there was de facto segregation. West Third Street served as the unofficial dividing line between African American residents and Hungarian residents.³³

By 1940, 84 percent of Dayton's African American population lived west of the Great Miami River, and the West Fifth Street corridor had become the center of African American cultural life and commerce, boasting seventy-one black-owned businesses on West Fifth in the three-quarters of a mile between Bank Street and Broadway. Nevertheless, race-based discrimination in Dayton continued, and beginning in 1954, the African American community began an organized effort to protest this discrimination and demand equal treatment and employment opportunities from local businesses. Perhaps in response to this activism, or simply in response to changing demographics in the pool of available labor, the National Cash Register company started an apprenticeship program for African Americans in 1958, whereas previously the company had only hired African Americans for menial labor positions, if at all.³⁴

The 1960s were a dramatic decade for Dayton and for cities across the United States. At the start of the decade, in 1960, a profile of West Dayton declared it the home of 95 percent of the city's African American residents, the result of continuing housing discrimination.³⁵ At the same time, Dayton's overall population decreased for the first time in its history, and a growing proportion of those who remained in the city were people of color, primarily African Americans.³⁶

A series of spontaneous protests, called "riots" at the time, in West Dayton in the mid-1960s further contributed to the impression that urban life was significantly more dangerous than the suburban options more and more European Americans with the resources to do so were choosing. The largest uprising, in September 1966, required the city to call in the National Guard. It began in response to the random killing of Lester Mitchell, an African American resident of West Dayton, in front of his home on West Fifth Street, by a carload of white men who shot Mitchell in the face. Because the shooting took place on the main road of the African American community, word of the murder quickly spread, and residents began venting their anger and frustration by throwing rocks, breaking windows, and confronting police who were trying to quell the reaction. Within hours, Dayton Mayor Dave Hall had requested the National Guard's assistance to contain the protests.³⁷

³³ Peters, *Dayton's African American Heritage*, 15, 49, 85, 145; Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 182.

³⁴ Peters, *Dayton's African American Heritage*, 85, 94, 145.

³⁵ Peters, 165.

³⁶ Dixon, "Social Profile," i.

³⁷ Josh Sweigart, "Lasting Scars, Part 1: Shooting Sparked 1966 Dayton Riots," *TCA Regional News*, August 30, 2016.

Although smaller in scale, two additional uprisings took place in this part of the city within the next year, in June 1967 and September 1967. The September 1967 uprising began in response to the murder of an unarmed African American man by city police. Two plain-clothes police officers (wearing Shriner's fezzes, after working a Shriner's convention that was in town) stopped an African American man, Robert Barbee, in West Dayton, when the officers mistook a pipe Barbee was carrying for a gun. When Barbee tried to flee, one of the officers, Robert Collier, shot Barbee twice in the back, killing him. Roughly five hundred residents of the neighborhood, described by the police as "young thugs and hoodlums," gathered in a parking lot to protest the shooting, and after the group dispersed, intermittent skirmishes between residents and police occurred for the next two days. West Dayton residents demanded greater racial diversity on the city police force, as well as psychological screening for all officers. Officer Collier, who had allegedly attempted to plant a gun on the victim after his death, was charged with first-degree manslaughter.³⁸ However, Collier was ultimately acquitted, leading to yet another protest, in January 1968.³⁹

The standard narrative about West Dayton is that the area experienced steady economic decline in response to the mid-1960s uprisings.⁴⁰ There is most likely some truth in this; spontaneous violence is a legitimate threat to residents' safety regardless of race, and it may have prompted those with the financial means to do so to relocate, leaving the neighborhood with a greater percentage of households without financial resources. However, the fact that racial discrimination and segregation were already long-standing in the city and that at least two of the incidents dubbed "riots" were responses to the murders of African Americans by European Americans suggests that this area was already struggling and treated with suspicion by authorities.⁴¹

A newspaper article from 1961, five years before the largest uprising, further supports this theory. A profile of Dayton's West Side, "The West Siders: Who Are They?," describes the neighborhood as if describing a foreign place that the newspaper's readers had never been to. Although the article does make the point that some of the area's residents are hard-working and middle-class, the author seems to be delivering this information as "news," something that would be counter to readers' impressions. The article also includes descriptions of poverty and crime, referring to the area as a "jungle" and quoting African Americans in dialect.⁴²

³⁸ Teaford, *The Twentieth-Century American City*, 153; "Fezzed Fuzz Popped Barbee to Light Dayton's Riot Fuse," *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 30, 1967; "500 Riot in Dayton after Negro Is Shot," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 20, 1967.

³⁹ "500 Demonstrate in Dayton Over Acquittal of Policeman," *New York Times*, January 27, 1968.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Loren S. Gannon Jr., "West Third Street, Dayton, OH," National Register of Historic Places District Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1989), 2, 5, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/71990545>.

⁴¹ Thomas Sugrue has made a similar argument for Detroit; see Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*.

⁴² Jessie Nicodemus, "The West Siders: Who Are They?," *Dayton Journal Herald*, September 23, 1961.

Nine years later, in 1970, in a discussion about urban renewal in Dayton, a city commissioner introduced a proposal to tear down a large swath of West Dayton and start over, building a racially and economically mixed neighborhood. The area he proposed to raze was immediately west of the Great Miami River, south of Wolf Creek, north of the railroad tracks, and east of Williams or Broadway—that is, the area that today surrounds Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP’s core parcel.⁴³

Although the city’s urban renewal director and another city commissioner spoke out against this idea, the West Dayton urban renewal plan that was eventually approved in 1976 was not so terribly different from this original idea. The approved plan called for widespread demolition and redevelopment of the Five Points neighborhood, roughly the same area that was targeted in 1970. This plan required the relocation of hundreds of residents, and between 1977 and 1979, Dayton city government assisted with the relocation of 161 households out of this roughly one-square-mile area.⁴⁴

In the early 1980s, Aviation Trail, Inc. (ATI), a local group with the idea of marketing Dayton’s aviation-related historic sites to tourists, discovered that two buildings associated with the Wright brothers were still standing. They were both on the edge of the Five Points neighborhood: the Hoover Block at the corner of West Third and South Williams and the Wright Cycle Shop at 22 South Williams Street. While the details of ATI’s efforts to save these buildings is covered in Chapter 8, “Cultural Resource Management,” from the perspective of the larger neighborhood, ATI’s involvement with these buildings was a critical event in the neighborhood’s history.

By the early 1980s, the city of Dayton was already well into its 1976 urban renewal plan for the area, which involved leveling a broad array of older, deteriorating buildings. Members of ATI, on the other hand, saw value in the neighborhood, largely in its ability to portray the era in which the Wrights had lived there. These competing agendas launched a period of negotiation, where municipal officials and local boosters grappled over the future of this area. The city soon adjusted its plans, however, seeing the potential of ATI’s efforts to revitalize the neighborhood.⁴⁵

Both the city of Dayton and ATI shared the goal of improving the economic fortunes of Dayton’s West Side and, generally speaking, both understood this goal in terms of assisting the residents of West Dayton. At the same time, neither entity had a significant number of West Dayton residents within their organizations, and this created the need for concerted outreach and trust-building. The successes and missteps of this effort are covered in Chapter 4, “Becoming a National Historical Park” and Chapter 5, “Park Partners.”

⁴³ Denise Goodman, “‘New Town’ Urged for West Dayton,” *Dayton Journal Herald*, August 1, 1970.

⁴⁴ Goodman; Kim Christensen, “Upward Mobility: Innerwest Renewal Aims toward Development, Expansion, Traffic Flow,” *Dayton Daily News*, June 1, 1979.

⁴⁵ Jerry Sharkey, Oral History I, interview by Ann Deines, February 16, 1996, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Christensen, “Upward Mobility: Innerwest Renewal Aims toward Development, Expansion, Traffic Flow.”

The National Park Service has also always understood the West Dayton neighborhoods that surround the core parcel and the Dunbar House as being critical park stakeholders and, like the groups before them, have met with mixed success. This topic is covered in Chapter 10, “Serving the Visitors.”

Industrial Decline

Amid the unrest and urban renewal efforts of the mid- to late-twentieth century, the city of Dayton was also experiencing a major shift in its local economy, as deindustrialization spread through this region of the country and forced a reassessment of Dayton’s civic identity.

The city was part of a larger region of manufacturing known as the Industrial Midwest. Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin were the center of American industrial manufacturing in the early and mid-twentieth century, and manufacturing was a central part of the US economy. But beginning in the 1960s, a wave of plant closings signaled a major shift in the US economy, away from manufacturing and toward the knowledge economy and the service industry. Dayton, along with the other cities of the Industrial Midwest, began the difficult transition to a post-industrial era.⁴⁶

A major blow to Dayton came in 1971, when Frigidaire threatened to close its manufacturing operations in the city. Frigidaire had been a major employer in Dayton since 1921, and by 1970, it employed 17,000 Daytonians and contributed over \$5.5 million dollars in local tax revenue.⁴⁷ With the threat of a major plant closing, the city scrambled to convince the corporation to remain in the area. Ultimately, Frigidaire workers agreed to wage concessions in exchange for the plant remaining open, quite likely what the corporation had been seeking all along. The ability of factory workers to earn a secure living was rapidly eroding. In 1979, General Motors, the parent company of Frigidaire, sold the brand to White Consolidated Industries, and in 1985, White announced it was moving operations out of Dayton.⁴⁸

The story of Frigidaire is just one example of a story that played out repeatedly in the late twentieth century. Between 1969 and 1976, the United States lost 22.3 million jobs, most in the manufacturing sector, and the national recession of the early 1980s further

⁴⁶ Steven C. High, *Industrial Sunset: The Making of North America’s Rust Belt, 1969–1984* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 20–25; Teaford, *Cities of the Heartland*, vii–xi. Sugrue argues that deindustrialization began even earlier; see Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*.

⁴⁷ High, *Industrial Sunset*, 244, n. 67.

⁴⁸ High, 149–54; “White Consolidated Plans to Centralize Certain Operations,” *Wall Street Journal, Eastern Edition*, June 24, 1985.

toppled the industrial base of the economy.⁴⁹ In 1982, Ohio's unemployment rate rose as high as 14.2 percent.⁵⁰ The former Industrial Midwest became known by a new name, the Rustbelt. A region that had once been a source of national pride for its industrial might instead became associated with economic decline, a workforce unable to adapt to changing realities, and a local landscape of industrial ruins.⁵¹

The Interplay of Deindustrialization and Heritage Tourism

Historians have created a substantial body of scholarship on the ways industrial heritage is preserved in public memory.⁵² A common theme in this literature is the identity challenges that hit municipalities and individual workers in the aftermath of deindustrialization. For cities and workers who built their identity on the pride of “making things,” the loss of industrial jobs can create an existential crisis for individuals, and a battle over the meanings of the past for communities. Was a locality's former industrial pride misplaced? Did its citizens' work amount to nothing? What is left of a place when the industry that made it distinctive is no longer there? These are vital civic questions. As historians Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo put it in their study of deindustrialization in Youngstown, Ohio, “Put simply, how Youngstown [or any post-industrial city] remembers its past plays a central role in how it envisions its future.”⁵³

Yet the issues facing the post-industrial city go beyond the merely existential. There is also the question of how to replace the economic base that has been lost. Historian Aaron Cowan has documented the shift many Rustbelt cities have made, from an economic reliance on industry to an economic reliance on tourism. In his words: “In the wake of late-1960s urban disorder and continued economic decline, tourism industries began to play an increasingly important role in marketing cities and highlighting distinctive aspects of urban locales that would promote positive images of those cities as

⁴⁹ Steven C. High and David W. Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca: IRL Press, 2007), 3–10, statistic from 3.

⁵⁰ High, *Industrial Sunset*, 29.

⁵¹ Teaford, *Cities of the Heartland*, 11; High, *Industrial Sunset*, 18–40; High and Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland*, 65–86.

⁵² See, for example, High and Lewis, *Corporate Wasteland*; Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo, *Steeltown USA: Work and Memory in Youngstown* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip067/2006003180.html>; Martha K. Norkunas, *Monuments and Memory: History and Representation in Lowell, Massachusetts* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002); Seth C. Bruggeman, *Lost on the Freedom Trail: The National Park Service and Urban Renewal in Postwar Boston* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2022).

⁵³ Linkon and Russo, *Steeltown USA*, 3.

places to visit but also as desirable places to live—thus tourist infrastructure became a means for appealing to outsiders *as well as* a city’s residents and suburbanites of the larger metropolitan region.”⁵⁴

Cowan goes on to link this trend toward urban tourist infrastructure to a backlash against the social programs of the New Deal and Great Society. In his argument, beginning in the 1970s, middle-class suburbanites (mostly European American) grew increasingly resentful of public money (federal, state, and local) going to help the urban poor (a greater percentage of whom were people of color). They in turn advocated for public investment that would benefit their demographic. There was a simultaneous belief that public investment in capitalist enterprises (such as casinos or sports stadiums) would ultimately assist urban dwellers, as tourist dollars “trickled down” to local enterprises such as restaurants and local employees of the large tourist attractions.⁵⁵

Tourist development, in Cowan’s argument, has also been used to send a message of vitality to Rustbelt cities struggling with images of deindustrialization, economic decline, and irrelevance: “In one celebrated renaissance after another, urban leaders pointed to these flashy recreational developments as evidence that their city was reborn. By the latter decades of the century, tourism development came to serve, in many cases, as proof that the city as a whole was vital, successful, and worthy of visitors, capital investment, and media attention.”⁵⁶

Finally, although generally critical of the effort, Cowan acknowledges that tourist development served an important role in the post-industrial city, creating a crucial economic stop-gap between an economy based on manufacturing to one based on “health care, technology, and finance.”⁵⁷ Nevertheless, he concludes, “The history of urban tourism in the postwar Rustbelt. . . suggests that an overzealous dedication to enhancing this role at the expense of the greater urban community leads to discord, resentment, and the remaking of central cities to serve the interests and tastes of outsiders rather than locals.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Aaron Cowan, *A Nice Place to Visit: Tourism and Urban Revitalization in the Postwar Rustbelt* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016), viii–ix, emphasis in original; see also Andrew Hurley, *Beyond Preservation: Using Public History to Revitalize Inner Cities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010).

⁵⁵ Cowan, *A Nice Place to Visit*, although this argument is made throughout the book, it is presented in condensed form on pp. 6–10.

⁵⁶ Cowan, 7.

⁵⁷ Cowan, 160.

⁵⁸ Cowan, 159.



Contemporary Dayton. Image: Wikimedia Commons.

Historian of the National Park Service Seth C. Bruggeman makes a similar argument. In *Lost on the Freedom Trail: The National Park Service and Urban Renewal in Postwar Boston*, Bruggeman places Boston National Historical Park squarely within Boston’s debates over urban renewal. Although the idea of a Revolutionary War park had been discussed for decades, Bruggeman argues that the legislation did not actually pass in Congress until Boston was gripped with the economic decline and “urban crisis” of the 1960s and 1970s. A particular catalyst to establishing the park, in Bruggeman’s telling, was the federal government’s announcement that it was decommissioning Charlestown Navy Yard. The closing of a Boston landmark—the navy yard was established in 1800—and the subsequent loss of jobs caused local leaders to double down on their embrace of the city’s reputation as the cradle of the American Revolution. The navy yard closed in 1974 and was included in the boundaries of the new national park unit, established that same year. This inclusion was anachronistic, of course, since the yard had not existed at the time of the revolution, but it becomes slightly more logical when we view the park as a more general effort to shore up Boston’s historical image of itself.⁵⁹

Anthropologist Cathy Stanton takes her exploration of deindustrialization and heritage tourism still further. She argues, first, that the display of industrial heritage has a much longer history, developing in tandem with industrialization itself. She also theorizes that industrial heritage sites, and the people who work at such places, are an important part of the larger systems of industrialization and deindustrialization. In her words: “Cultural

⁵⁹ Bruggeman, *Lost on the Freedom Trail*; Hurley makes a similar argument for St. Louis; see Hurley, *Beyond Preservation*.

workers have served crucial functions by explaining and helping people—sometimes including themselves—to adapt to the ongoing volatility of industrialism and capitalism, often from class positions that exemplify the uncertainties of emergent and contingent professions or statuses. Seen this way, the labor of producing heritage and display appears as a complementary, not supplementary, activity that ultimately enables and extends capitalism’s reach, a process that continues into the present and that has now become a primary economic driver—or at least an aspiration—in many places.”⁶⁰

Conclusion

Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was created at a moment when the city of Dayton was grappling with a feeling that its best days were behind it. The city as a whole was struggling to find its economic footing in an era when industry was clearly on the decline, but the city had not yet reinvented itself as a center of health care and aeronautical research. The city, in the 1980s and 1990s, also lacked a clear sense of itself in the face of industrial decline. More specifically, the inner neighborhoods of Dayton’s west side labored under an image of urban poverty and crime and faced imminent threats of razing in the name of urban renewal. As detailed in Chapter 3 of this report, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP emerged as the answer to so many of Dayton’s challenges. It could boost the local economy, revitalize a struggling and endangered neighborhood, and remind the city’s residents of its earlier role as the cradle of American ingenuity.

⁶⁰ Cathy Stanton, “Displaying the Industrial: Toward a Genealogy of Heritage Labor,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 16, no. 1 (2019): 152.

CHAPTER TWO

The Federal Government in the Post-Industrial City

Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park (NHP) was established during a thirty-year period of unprecedented expansion for the National Park Service (NPS), outpacing even the mid-twentieth-century growth period known as Mission 66. Between 1973 and 2004, due in large part to acquisitions in Alaska, the land under NPS jurisdiction more than doubled. Also during this period, 133 national park units were added to the system, and seventy-eight of these had history as their primary significance.¹

This expansion was in many ways the manifestation of the NPS's turn-of-the-twenty-first-century goal of staying relevant amid the changing demographics of the United States. Many of these new park units, including the one in Dayton, were located in urban environments, rather than in remote wilderness areas. Many also dealt with parts of the American past that had been previously excluded from the collection of national park units. And because much of this expansion occurred during years of constricted federal budgets, many of these units, like Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, represented another agency trend of the late twentieth century: the partnership park. Developed as a means of increasing NPS relevance amid limited budget increases, partnership parks are NPS units that are managed in partnership with other entities at the local, state, or federal level.²

This chapter considers Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP within the context of larger trends in the history of the National Park Service, in order to put the operations of this particular park unit within a broader framework. The chapter begins with an overview of NPS history during the last half of the twentieth century. The rest of the chapter focuses on three particularly pertinent agency initiatives related to its effort to become more relevant:

¹ Barry Mackintosh, Janet A. McDonnell, and John H. Sprinkle, *The National Parks: Shaping the System*, 4th ed., Reprinted in *George Wright Forum*, v. 35, no. 2 (2018) (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2018), 57, 63.

² Barry Mackintosh, Janet A. McDonnell, and John H. Sprinkle, *The National Parks: Shaping the System*, 4th ed., Reprinted in *George Wright Forum*, v. 35, no. 2 (2018) (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2018), 60, 63; National Park Service Stewardship Institute, "Urban Agenda: Call to Action Initiative" (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, March 2015), 1, https://www.nps.gov/subjects/urban/upload/UrbanAgenda_web.pdf; Laura B. Comay, *National Park Service: Partnership Parks and Programs*, electronic resource (Washington, DC: Library of Congress Congressional Research Service, 2011); Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 60, 63; National Park Service Stewardship Institute, "Urban Agenda," 1; Comay, *National Park Service: Partnership Parks*.

national parks in urban areas, diversifying the stories told at national parks, and partnership parks as an agency strategy both for reducing costs and creating a culture of collaboration.

The National Park Service, 1956–2016

In preparation for the fiftieth anniversary of the National Park Service in 1966, the agency launched a massive effort to improve infrastructure in park units and expand visitor services. Known as Mission 66, this program was a response to dramatically increased visitation to national park sites after World War II, a result of postwar prosperity and the Cold War's increased emphasis on family-centered leisure. Between 1940 and 1960, visits to national park units more than *quadrupled*, from seventeen million to an astounding seventy-two million annually.³

Mission 66, which ran from 1956 to 1966, was the vision of Conrad L. Wirth, who served as NPS director from 1951 to 1963. A landscape architect by training, Wirth had worked for the NPS since 1931 and sought input from NPS employees in the field when formulating his ideas for Mission 66. He also obtained the support of Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay and President Dwight Eisenhower and secured a ten-year funding package from Congress to execute his vision.⁴

George B. Hartzog Jr., who took over as NPS director in January 1964, oversaw the final years of the Mission 66 program and went on to make his own significant mark on the agency in the eight years he served as director. Hartzog had previously served as superintendent of Jefferson National Expansion Memorial (now Gateway Arch National Park), one of the few urban parks in the system before the 1970s. No doubt influenced both by his time in St. Louis and by the growing “urban crisis” of the 1960s, Hartzog made the creation of national parks in or near US cities a major goal of his tenure.⁵ In addition to his emphasis on urban parks, Hartzog was responsible for many other initiatives that are today hallmarks of the National Park Service. In his own assessment, Hartzog identified his major accomplishments as the expansion of national park units into urban areas; the diversification of the NPS workforce to include women and people of color; important legislation to

³ Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 40–56; Ethan Carr, *Mission 66: Modernism and the National Park Dilemma* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press; in association with Library of American Landscape History, 2007), 3–15, visitation statistics from Carr, 4, and Mackintosh, 40.

⁴ Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 40–59; George B. Hartzog, *Battling for the National Parks*, 1st ed. (Mt. Kisco, NY: Moyer Bell, 1988), 84–85.

⁵ Sarah J. Morath, “A Park for Everyone: The National Park Service in Urban America,” *Natural Resources Journal* 56, no. 1 (Winter 2016): 5–6; Hartzog, *Battling for the National Parks*, 91. These efforts are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

facilitate NPS holdings in Alaska; the passage of the legislation establishing the National Park Foundation; the creation of the Volunteers-in-Parks (VIP) program; and the passage of the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act.⁶

In addition to these accomplishments, Hartzog initiated a National Park System plan, published in 1972, to take a comprehensive look at the NPS's holdings and identify gaps, which in turn would guide the agency in determining future designations of national park units. In his own words: "The fields were white for harvest [*sic*]. Now was the time, if we were to preserve the remaining vignettes of our natural inheritance and reach out to commemorate and [memorialize] the cultural heritage of the industrial revolution, discoveries in the sciences, medicine, the arts, music and literature, and the remarkable growth in understanding of individual worth and human rights."⁷



NPS Director George Hartzog was responsible for many of the initiatives we associate with the National Park Service today. Image: NPS Harpers Ferry Center Historical Photograph Collection.

⁶ Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 40, 59; Kathy Mengak, *Reshaping Our National Parks and Their Guardians: The Legacy of George B. Hartzog Jr.* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012), 1, 9.

⁷ Hartzog, *Battling for the National Parks*, 89.

Volume I of the 1972 system plan focused on history and outlined major historical themes, with the idea that the National Park System should cover the full range of US history. Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, when it was added to the system twenty years after this report, represented numerous subcategories of the “America at Work” theme (Commerce and Industry; Science and Invention; Transportation and Communication; and Engineering), as well as the subcategory of Literature, Drama, and Music under the “Contemplative Society” theme.⁸

In 1972, the National Park System plan identified only eleven national park units with primary significance in the area of “America at Work.” More specifically, it stated that the subtheme of Science and Invention was “grossly under-represented” within the National Park System (although the Wright Brothers National Memorial, in North Carolina, was listed as one of the NPS holdings in this topic). In addition, the report identified only three units with primary significance under the Transportation and Communication subtheme, “all in the facets of land and water transportation.” It specifically commented on the lack of sites in the system related to air and space transportation and suggested “an airfield with planes of various types and vintages” as an example of a potential new addition to the system to address this gap.⁹

In all, during the eight years of Hartzog’s tenure, the National Park Service added a mind-boggling *seventy* national park units to the system and doubled its visitation. The two NPS directors who followed Hartzog—Ronald H. Walker (1973–75) and Gary Everhardt (1975–77)—sought to slow the rapid expansion of the National Park System, but Congress disagreed with this approach and continued to establish park units at a rapid pace. The next director, William Whalen (1977–80), like Hartzog, came to Washington after serving as superintendent of an urban park, in this case Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Under his directorship, NPS doubled its landholdings with the establishment of multiple large park units in Alaska. Under the Reagan administration, the agency experienced a slowdown of new designations, as NPS Director Russell Dickenson (1980–85) focused agency resources on caring for existing resources. However, the NPS returned to “a more expansionist posture” with the directorship of William Penn Mott Jr. (1985–89).¹⁰

James M. Ridenour came to the National Park Service directorship from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, which he had overseen. He served as NPS director from 1989 to January 1993 and so was the head of the agency at the time that Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was authorized. One of Ridenour’s hallmarks was his effort

⁸ National Park Service, ed., *The National Park System Plan*, vol. 1: History (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1970), <http://npshistory.com/publications/system-plan-1.pdf>; Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 46.

⁹ National Park Service, ed., *The National Park System Plan*, vol. 1: History (Washington: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1970), 55, 60–61, <http://npshistory.com/publications/system-plan-1.pdf>.

¹⁰ “Past Directors of the National Park Service,” US National Park Service, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/nps-directors.htm>; Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 57–60, quotation from 60.

to slow down the federal acquisition of new resources. As part of this effort, he was a strong proponent of the idea of partnership parks, where the NPS collaborates with other entities in the management of national park units, often with the external park partners actually owning the resources. Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP bears the mark of Ridenour's vision, being a textbook example of a partnership park.¹¹

Ridenour's successor, Roger Kennedy (1993–97), came to the park service after serving as director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. He had a special affinity for education and interpretation, as well as a historical background. During Kennedy's tenure, the NPS substantially overhauled its thematic framework for US history. First developed in the 1930s, the framework was designed to assist "in evaluating historic properties, in assessing how well American history is represented in the existing park system, and in enhancing park interpretive programs to provide a fuller understanding of the Nation's past." However, by the last decade of the century, the existing framework, which had been revised in 1970 and 1987 but maintained its original structure, was no longer adequate to capture the full range of historical understanding that had developed over the course of the twentieth century.¹²

In 1991, Congress ordered a full overhaul of the NPS thematic framework. A team of historians from both inside and outside the park service was assembled, and in 1994, the agency adopted the fully revised framework, officially titled *History in the National Park Service: Themes & Concepts*. The new framework dispensed with the topical and chronological structure of previous versions, as well as the organizing principle "Stages of American Progress." In their place, the 1994 framework promoted a more fluid approach that recognized a greater diversity of past experience, accounted for overlapping topics, and considered the ways themes might affect each other. This significant shift in the way the agency approached historical topics took place while Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was developing its first interpretive plan, which was released in 1997. Quite likely, the new thematic framework influenced the planning team in Dayton; however, the park's interpretive plan does not explicitly reference the framework or any influence it did or did not have on the planning process.¹³

Robert Stanton, a career NPS employee and the first African American man to head the agency, took over as NPS director in 1997 and served until 2005. By the start of Stanton's tenure, a new century was rapidly drawing near. In December 1999, he requested

¹¹ "Past Directors of the National Park Service"; Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 60. Partnership parks are the subject of further discussion later in this chapter.

¹² "Past Directors of the National Park Service"; Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 60, 74; Park History Program, "History in the National Park Service: Themes & Concepts" (Washington DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1994), 1–2, quotation from 2.

¹³ Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 74; Park History Program, "History in the National Park Service: Themes & Concepts," 1–2; National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan" (Denver: US Department of the Interior, 1997).

that the National Park Service Advisory Board develop a vision for the agency's next twenty-five years. The result, released in July 2001, was a report entitled *Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century*.¹⁴

The document outlined seven broad goals for the park service. Three had particular relevance for Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. The first and second were goals that applied equally to all historical park units: (1) embrace the park service's mission as an educator, and (2) encourage the study of the American past by developing programs based on current scholarship. The third goal with major relevance for Dayton signaled a new priority for the agency: (3) nurture living cultures and communities. While much of the discussion of this goal focused on Indigenous nations, toward the end of this chapter the report expanded its vision to include "the diverse ethnic groups and nationalities that worked the farms and factories of a growing nation."¹⁵ It could have been describing Dayton and its national park when it stated: "Communities looking for a way to save their special places have worked across jurisdictional boundaries and joined together to plan a future that embraces the past. Many have sought National Park Service recognition and assistance to validate the significance of their heritage to the nation. The Service should welcome such efforts."¹⁶

This chapter of the twenty-first-century report went on to specifically discuss National Heritage Areas as a means of preserving regional cultural landscapes, particularly those related to specific industries or modes of transportation.¹⁷ Although Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was nearly done with its initial development phase by 2001 and the National Aviation Heritage Area was not yet designated, it appeared the city of Dayton was well aligned with the NPS's vision for the new century.

Part of the impetus for the twenty-first-century report was the fact that the NPS centennial was not too far off; the agency would celebrate that milestone in 2016. As such, the period between the turn of the twenty-first century and the centennial—an era that also included the centennial of the momentous American Antiquities Act in 2006 and the fiftieth anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act in 2016—involved much soul searching within the agency about its future. Out of this era of introspection came a growing commitment to demonstrating the agency's relevance to all Americans, not just its traditional base of native-born European Americans with enough resources to go on vacations far from home.

¹⁴ "Past Directors of the National Park Service"; Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 77; National Park System Advisory Board, "Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century" (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2001), 1–9, <https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/DownloadFile/430527>.

¹⁵ National Park System Advisory Board, "Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century," quotation from 23.

¹⁶ National Park System Advisory Board, 23.

¹⁷ National Park System Advisory Board, 23.

The Issue of Relevance

The National Park Service is a public agency and so has long grappled with the issue of finding balance between resource conservation and public access. However, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, this dichotomy seemed increasingly outdated. Public access suggested out-of-the-way wilderness and visitor infrastructure such as roads and potable water. While these connotations still reflected the reality of some national park units, they did not reflect the overall concerns of the twenty-first-century park service, which had moved far beyond its original scope.¹⁸

Just as the National Park System had changed over time, so had this traditional balancing act between conservation and public access. More and more at the turn of the twenty-first century, the fundamental challenge of the NPS was described instead as finding a balance between conservation and *relevance*. The country's demographics had changed substantially in the century since the agency's establishment. In 1920, the US population had been 89.7 percent European American; in 2019, European Americans composed only 60.4 percent.¹⁹ Similarly, in 2016, NPS Deputy Director of Operations Peggy O'Dell stated: "Eighty percent of our population lives in urban areas. Millennials are less likely to spend time outdoors. Research has also shown us that the park service has not kept pace with these changes. Our workforce is not reflective of the American people we aim to serve, and our stories can be more inclusive and multi-dimensional. Thirty-six percent of Americans are people of color; only 18.6% of the NPS workforce is."²⁰

There is a solid reason for the NPS to strive for relevance. The agency's holdings represent the cultural and natural richness of the United States, but that effort is only successful if those holdings represent the full range of that richness. However, there is also a pressing political expediency to the goal of relevance. Former NPS Regional Director John J. Reynolds reminds us that "in a representative democracy there are no permanent entitlements. The national parks are not 'entitled' to exist forever under the law. . . . They are only a part of the fabric of the nation because the collectively expressed experience of 'we the people' makes them so."²¹

¹⁸ Carr, *Mission 66*, 12–15.

¹⁹ US Census Bureau, *1920 Census, Volume 3: Population, Composition, and Characteristics of the Population by States* (Washington, DC: United States Census Bureau, 1922), <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1922/dec/vol-03-population.html>; US Census Bureau, "QuickFacts: United States," July 1, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219>. These numbers are not directly comparable, because the 1920 census did not have a separate category for Hispanic, and the 2019 percentage represents the white, non-Hispanic population. However, I chose the 60.4 number for "White alone, not Hispanic or Latino" rather than the number for "White alone" (76.5 percent), because it seemed most likely that a far greater percentage of Hispanic/Latino Americans were in the country in 2019 than in 1920.

²⁰ Peggy O'Dell, "Redefining the National Park Service Role in Urban Areas: Bringing the Parks to the People," *Journal of Leisure Research* 48, no. 1 (2016): 7, <https://doi.org/DOI:10.18666/jlr-2016-v48-i1-7168>.

²¹ John J. Reynolds, "Whose America? Whose Idea? Making 'America's Best Idea' Reflect New American Realities," *George Wright Forum* 27, no. 2 (2010): 126.

It was clear that, moving forward, the National Park Service would need to work hard to stay relevant within a new America. The agency identified numerous ways to address these concerns. Three of the major areas of focus—those with relevance to Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP—were (1) expanding NPS presence in urban areas; (2) diversifying the stories told and the people who work at national parks; and (3) creating a “culture of collaboration,” where NPS employees became comfortable partnering with those outside the agency and became stakeholders in their local communities.²² These efforts overlapped a good deal, because they were all ultimately pointing back to the big goal of increasing relevance. Looking at each effort in turn illuminates the ways in which Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP developed within the context of larger agency realities.

Urban National Parks

Although the National Park Service was established in 1916, the agency as we generally understand it today stems largely from a 1933 reorganization under President Franklin Roosevelt and NPS Director Horace Albright. This reorganization, accomplished by two executive orders in June and July 1933, moved a significant amount of federal land to NPS jurisdiction. These lands included all national military parks and monuments, previously held by the War Department; national monuments held by the Department of Agriculture; and the national capital parks. The result, in the words of agency historian Barry Mackintosh, was that “there was now a single system of federal parklands, truly national in scope, embracing historic as well as natural places.”²³ Interestingly, Reynolds argues that even this 1930s reorganization was an effort on the part of Horace Albright to increase the agency’s relevance to the US population. Expanding NPS holdings increased the number of people who had connections to the lands NPS now oversaw. The reorganization also dramatically increased NPS holdings in the east, where the majority of the US population lived.²⁴

With the 1933 transfer of the national capital parks, the National Park Service acquired its first park units on urban land. It also acquired its oldest parklands; the capital parks date back to the 1790s and the original creation of the District of Columbia. With the addition of these historic parks as well as the nation’s military parks and monuments, the NPS assumed a major role in preserving the country’s cultural resources. This role was

²² National Park Service Stewardship Institute, “Urban Agenda,” 9.

²³ Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 2, 16–17, quotation from 17.

²⁴ Reynolds, “Whose America? Whose Idea?,” 128.

further elaborated in the Historic Sites Act, signed into law in August 1935. This law charged the NPS with surveying the nation's historic resources and making recommendations of places to be included in the National Park System because of their historic significance.²⁵

The NPS's first new unit created under the Historic Sites Act was the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, designated in December 1935 and situated in the heart of St. Louis. With this site, NPS further expanded its urban holdings and introduced a new issue the agency has been dealing with ever since. Whereas the national capital parks had been designated as part of the original plans for DC, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial encompassed an existing urban landscape that was ultimately razed to make way for the park's signature feature, Eero Saarinen's Gateway Arch, erected in the 1960s. Indeed, despite its origins in the 1930s—well before the mid-twentieth-century height of US urban renewal efforts—Jefferson National Expansion Memorial was originally conceived of by local leaders seeking a means to resuscitate their dilapidated waterfront district. The agency again waded into this territory when it acquired Independence National Historical Park (NHP) in the central part of Philadelphia in 1948. Arguably, Independence NHP also represents a prototype of a partnership park. The city of Philadelphia, not the NPS, owns Independence Hall, a key feature of the park.²⁶

Thus the agency has overseen urban national park units for nearly ninety years. However, NPS involvement in urban areas greatly expanded beginning in the mid-1960s. By that decade, the negative effects of urban renewal on historic properties were becoming apparent. Urban activist Jane Jacobs published her famous book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* in 1961, arguing that urban renewal programs actually hurt the city residents they were designed to help. And in 1964, one of New York City's architectural treasures, Penn Station, was demolished despite sizable opposition. All these forces combined to mobilize a historic preservation movement that resulted in the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, establishing the National Register of Historic Places and placing federal historic preservation oversight within the National Park Service.²⁷

Then-Director of the National Park Service George Hartzog was a vocal advocate of the Historic Preservation Act. He was also, not coincidentally, the former superintendent of Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. As such, he was well-versed on the issues affecting urban environments in the mid-twentieth century. He was not the only

²⁵ Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 16–18, 33; Denise D. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 123–24; National Park Service Stewardship Institute, “Urban Agenda,” 3.

²⁶ Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 33–35; Hartzog, *Battling for the National Parks*, 37–39; Edward Roach, Comments to Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

²⁷ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, originally published by Random House, 1961 (New York: Vintage Books, 1992); Barry Mackintosh, *The National Historic Preservation Act and the National Park Service: A History* (Washington, DC: History Division, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, 1986).

government official concerned about the future of US cities. President Lyndon Johnson launched a sweeping series of programs known as the Great Society during his term in office, 1963–68, designed to address poverty, poor health, and urban infrastructure decay. In the words of agency historian Barry Mackintosh, Hartzog proved “a willing ally in advancing an activist park policy for Johnson’s Great Society.”²⁸

As part of his goal of making national parks relevant to urban Americans, Hartzog was responsible for two of the National Park Service’s most ambitious urban acquisitions in its history: Gateway National Recreation Area in New York City and Golden Gate National Recreation Area in the San Francisco Bay Area, both designated in 1972. Both of these sites aggregated a range of natural and cultural resources in and around major US cities, specifically for the enjoyment of those cities’ residents. In the words of NPS Historian Coxe Toogood, these two recreation areas “set a precedent for a nationwide interest in establishing more public parks in and near this country’s many urban centers.”²⁹ NPS historian Barry Mackintosh concurs: “Before Gateway and Golden Gate, nearly all the Service’s holdings in major urban areas outside the national capital region had been small historic sites, where the primary concerns were historic preservation and interpretation. These two acquisitions placed the NPS squarely in the business of urban mass recreation for essentially local populations—not previously a federal responsibility. Like earlier departures into historic sites, parkways, and reservoir areas, this move stirred controversy about the bureau’s proper role. Attendant burdens of funding, staffing, and management refocus would prove significant challenges for years to come.”³⁰

The National Park Service entered a period of flux in the 1970s, with three consecutive directors being ousted within the course of five years, 1972–77.³¹ Nevertheless, the establishment of national park units in urban areas continued at a brisk pace throughout this decade. Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area between Akron and Cleveland (1975, now Cuyahoga Valley National Park), Boston National Historical Park (1974), Lowell National Historical Park (1978) in Massachusetts, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area in Los Angeles (1978), and Chattahoochee National Recreation

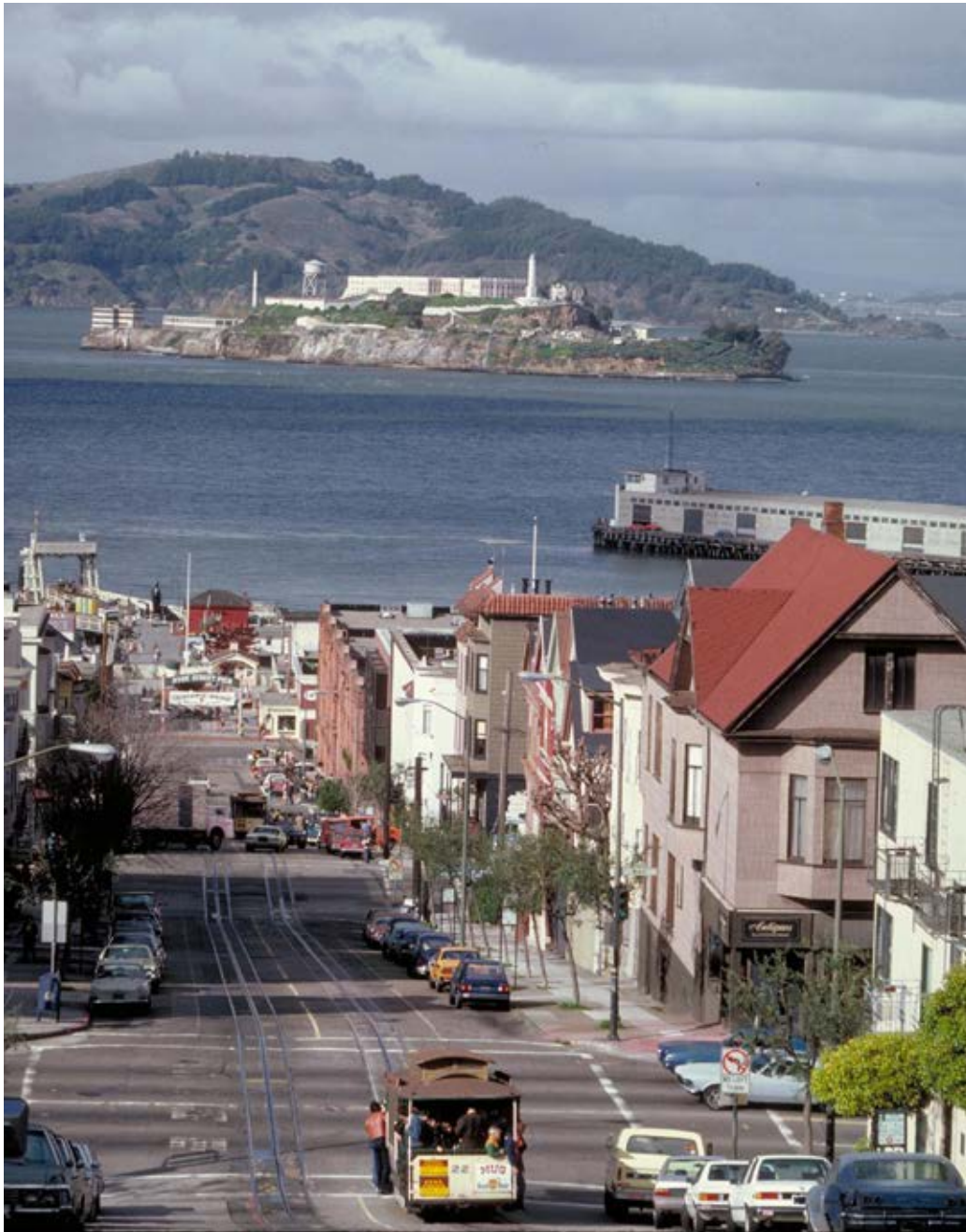
²⁸ Mackintosh, *The National Historic Preservation Act and the National Park Service*, 40–43, quotation from 40; Mengak, *Reshaping Our National Parks and Their Guardians*, 9. Historian Thomas Sugrue, however, argues that the Great Society came too late to address the nation’s “urban crisis.” See Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

²⁹ Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 55; National Park Service Stewardship Institute, “Urban Agenda,” 9; Anne Coxe Toogood, “A Civil History of Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Point Reyes National Seashore, Volume 2,” Historic Resource Study (Denver: National Park Service, Denver Service Center, June 1980), 179–80.

³⁰ Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 56.

³¹ Hartzog, *Battling for the National Parks*, 265.

Area in Atlanta (1978) all joined the National Park System in this era. They were joined by numerous smaller historic sites as well, such as Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site in Philadelphia and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site in Richmond, Virginia.³²



Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco was one of the National Park Service's first large-scale efforts to reach urban residents close to home. Here, a street in San Francisco overlooks Alcatraz Island, part of the Golden Gate park unit. Image: NPS Harpers Ferry Historical Photograph Collection.

³² Morath, "A Park for Everyone," 7; US National Park Service, "Park Anniversaries," 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/npscelebrates/park-anniversaries.htm>.

By 2015, forty of the fifty largest population centers in the US were home to at least one national park unit.³³ And because of their proximity to population centers, large urban parks provide some of the largest visitation rates in the park system. Yet Hartzog and his successors' efforts to expand the NPS's urban holdings did not coalesce into an explicit and coherent urban park policy within the agency.³⁴ It wasn't until the approach of the NPS centennial and its subsequent focus on relevance that comprehensive attention was given to NPS holdings in urban areas.

In 2012, the City Parks Alliance, in partnership with the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, organized a conference titled "Greater and Greener: Re-Imagining Parks for 21st Century Cities." NPS employees who attended the conference formed a caucus and urged NPS Director Jonathan Jarvis to identify and institute policy changes that would better allow urban parks to meet the needs of urban Americans.³⁵ The NPS launched an urban initiative, and in 2015 it released a report titled "Urban Agenda."

This report argued that the nation's cities were an underutilized opportunity for the agency. In 2015, 80 percent of the US population lived in urban areas, but only 30 percent of the NPS operating budget went to urban park units. These urban park sites comprised just over a third of all NPS units, 36 percent of annual NPS visitation, and 17 percent of the NPS workforce.³⁶

Part of the urban initiative's purpose was simply to publicize—both inside and outside the agency—the NPS's commitment to urban areas. In the agency's own words: "The NPS Urban Agenda contains a number of specific strategies, but most importantly it puts forth a way of working that is more intentional, collaborative and ultimately more sustainable. The Agenda recommends an unprecedented strategic alignment of parks, programs and partners—a mobilization and coordination of all NPS resources."³⁷

The Urban Agenda was explicit about the agency's interest in reaching a wider array of the American public. Of the three overarching goals of the program, the first was "Be Relevant to All Americans." Another was "Nurture a Culture of Collaboration," which we will explore in more detail later in this chapter.³⁸ With regard to relevance, the agenda went on to say: "Urban national parks are particularly well positioned as places where young

³³ O'Dell, "Redefining the National Park Service Role in Urban Areas," 7.

³⁴ Morath, "A Park for Everyone," 7–8.

³⁵ Rolf Diamant, "An Urban Parks Agenda for Everyone?," *George Wright Forum* 31, no. 2 (2014): 109; Morath, "A Park for Everyone," 15.

³⁶ O'Dell, "Redefining the National Park Service Role in Urban Areas," 7; National Park Service Stewardship Institute, "Urban Agenda," 7.

³⁷ National Park Service Stewardship Institute, "Urban Agenda," 3; see also O'Dell, "Redefining the National Park Service Role in Urban Areas," 7.

³⁸ National Park Service Stewardship Institute, "Urban Agenda," 9.

people, many from diverse and often underserved communities, can experience close-to-home outdoor recreation and nature; arts, culture and history; and perhaps most importantly, gain some sense of confidence and encouragement about their own future.”³⁹

Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was authorized in 1992, about twenty years on either side of these two surges of agency interest in reaching urban audiences. Nevertheless, by thinking of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP within this larger context of urban national park units, lessons can be discerned. One of the park’s most distinctive features—its array of partners—becomes much *less* unusual when considered alongside the urban parks. Indeed, parks like Boston National Historical Park and Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area have a similarly complicated partnership structure. Likewise, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP is well positioned to play a critical role in the agency’s twenty-first-century strategy of improving its reach to residents of urban population centers.

Diversifying Stories

Another element of the National Park Service’s efforts to become more relevant involved diversifying the stories represented by and interpreted at national park units. The beginning of these efforts was apparent as early as the 1960s. A policy memo from US Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel to NPS management in 1969 stated, “There are serious gaps and inadequacies which must be remedied while opportunities still exist if the System is to fulfill the people’s need always to see and understand their heritage of history and the natural world.”⁴⁰ The agency began addressing some of these gaps in the 1970s, with the addition of Clara Barton National Historic Site in 1974, Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site in 1974, and Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site in 1978, to name but a few. In 1980 alone, Boston African American National Historic Site, Kalaupapa National Historical Park, Martin Luther King National Historical Park, and Women’s Rights National Historical Park all entered the system.⁴¹

NPS fervor for diverse stories quelled in the 1980s, and when Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was established in 1992, it was part of a 1990s return to representing ethnic diversity within the park system. Mary McLeod Bethune Council House National Historic Site was established in 1991, and *Brown v. Board of Education* National Historic Site, Manzanar National Historic Site, and Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park were all added the following year. Although there was some initial discussion about whether to include the Paul Laurence Dunbar House within the boundaries of Dayton

³⁹ National Park Service Stewardship Institute, 3.

⁴⁰ Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 43.

⁴¹ Rebecca Conard, “‘All Men and Women Are Created Equal’: An Administrative History of Women’s Rights National Historical Park” (Boston: Organization of American Historians, US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2012), xiii, 16; US National Park Service, “Park Anniversaries.”

Aviation Heritage NHP, most park advocates favored inclusion. Indeed, the relationship *between* the Wright brothers and Dunbar, and the fact that they had lived in a racially integrated neighborhood, comprised a significant part of the park's appeal. As discussed in the next chapter, park advocates saw in Dayton the potential to represent and interpret racial integration and collaboration, in contrast to most park units at that time.⁴²

The establishment of these national park units in the early 1990s was in fact part of a larger effort by the National Park Service to address long-standing gaps in representing the full history of the United States. As former NPS Regional Director Reynolds has argued, "the very foundation of the parks was laid on a network of unexamined assumptions about which group of citizens the parks were 'for.' In short, the early development of America's national parks is a classic example of generally unacknowledged 'white privilege' in action."⁴³ The early 1990s marked the beginning of a sustained and concerted effort on the part of the agency to address the prejudices historically embedded in the work of the National Park Service.

In addition to increasing the number of units focused on traditionally excluded aspects of the nation's past, this era also witnessed a related effort to diversify the make-up of the National Register of Historic Places and the National Historic Landmarks program. In the 1990s, the NPS commissioned a five-part series of National Historic Landmark (NHL) Theme Studies on the civil rights movement, as well as two theme studies on cultural clashes—one focused on conflicts between Indigenous nations and one focused on conflicts between Native Americans and early European settlers.⁴⁴

The agency also established numerous diversity initiatives that spanned across parks and programs, while also lending support to historic sites outside of the NPS system. In 1998, Congress established the NPS Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program, which documents and promotes sites and programs that tell the story of resistance to slavery.

In 2001, the NPS sponsored a conference in Atlanta called "Places of Cultural Memory: African Reflections on the American Landscape," and two years later, in 2003, it published an interpretive booklet on the same topic.⁴⁵ These efforts did more than simply provide new content; they advocated for new approaches to the past. The Network to Freedom program educated historians and community members about the proper use of

⁴² US National Park Service, "Park Anniversaries"; Ellen Belcher, "Don't Leave Dunbar Out of Park Bill," *Dayton Daily News*, June 25, 1992; Brad Tillson, Oral History, interview by Ann Deines, February 29, 1996, 8.

⁴³ Reynolds, "Whose America? Whose Idea?," 128.

⁴⁴ Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 76–77; National Park Service, "Full List of Theme Studies," National Historic Landmarks Program, n.d., <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoricalandmarks/full-list-of-theme-studies.htm>.

⁴⁵ Brian D. Joyner, ed., *African Reflections on the American Landscape: Identifying and Interpreting Africanisms* (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Center for Cultural Resources, Office of Diversity and Special Projects, 2003).

oral tradition as a historical source, and the “African Reflections” booklet demonstrated the myriad African influences present in US culture, introducing a new way to think about African and African American contributions to the national story. In subsequent years, “Reflections on the American Landscape” became a series of booklets. “African Reflections on the American Landscape” was followed by “Asian Reflections on the American Landscape” (2005) and “Hispanic Reflections on the American Landscape” (2009).⁴⁶

In 2012, the agency consolidated a range of diversity initiatives under one overarching rubric known as “Telling All Americans’ Stories.” In the decade that followed, the NPS released additional NHL theme studies on Latino/a, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and LGBTQ history. Various additional publications, staff training media, and funding opportunities have supported the overarching goal of aligning NPS interpretation and resource management to more accurately reflect the nation’s multicultural past.⁴⁷

In addition to representing a greater range of ethnic perspectives, the National Park Service was also interested in moving beyond the political and military history that had been the mainstay of historic site designations throughout the twentieth century. This interest is evident in the 1972 National Park System plan, which sought to identify historical gaps in the holdings of the NPS, and the 1994 reworking of the NPS thematic framework. The establishment of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was also part of a larger agency effort to add US industrial heritage to the narrative of the nation’s history.⁴⁸

Lowell National Historical Park, established in 1978 in Massachusetts, was the NPS’s first major effort to represent industrial heritage. Lowell was one of the nation’s first planned industrial communities and quickly became a center of textile manufacturing in the nineteenth century. By 1978, however, the city was struggling, as the mills closed and manufacturing moved overseas. Ironically, Lowell’s depressed economy meant that there was not much new development in the industrial part of town, and thus the nineteenth-century factories and canal system remained intact. City officials settled on the idea that these

⁴⁶ Joyner; Brian D. Joyner, ed., *Asian Reflections on the American Landscape: Identifying and Interpreting Asian Heritage* (US Department of the Interior, National Parks Service, National Center for Cultural Resources, Office of Diversity and Special Projects, 2005); Brian D. Joyner, *Hispanic Reflections on the American Landscape: Identifying and Interpreting Hispanic Heritage* (Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2009); “Our History: Network to Freedom,” National Park Service, 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1205/our-history.htm>.

⁴⁷ National Park Service, “Full List of Theme Studies”; Megan E. Springate, ed., *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History* (Washington, DC: National Park Foundation and National Park Service, 2016), <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/tellingallamericansstories/lgbtqthemestudy.htm>; “Telling All Americans’ Stories,” National Park Service, accessed May 22, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/tellingallamericansstories/index.htm>; “American Latino Heritage—Telling All Americans’ Stories,” National Park Service, April 27, 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/tellingallamericansstories/americanlatinoheritage.htm>; “Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage,” National Park Service, July 18, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/aapiheritage/index.htm>. National Park Service, “Full List of Theme Studies”; Springate, *LGBTQ America*; “Telling All Americans’ Stories”; “American Latino Heritage—Telling All Americans’ Stories”; “Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage.”

⁴⁸ National Park Service, *National Park System Plan, vol. 1*; Park History Program, “History in the National Park Service: Themes & Concepts.”

resources could be used to portray the industrial heritage that the United States was quickly losing, and National Park Service officials agreed. Local park advocates made no secret of their hope that Lowell National Historical Park would revitalize the local economy by bringing in jobs and tourist dollars, and in fact, the park did improve the city's fortunes.⁴⁹

In their vision for Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, local advocates unabashedly used Lowell NHP as a model. A delegation of advocates, city officials, and skeptics traveled from Dayton to Lowell, to talk to local officials there about the process of pursuing national park status. The scale of Lowell NHP's resources, combined with its success at resuscitating the local economy, convinced the Dayton team that their vision was in fact feasible. Park advocates in Dayton also engaged the head of the Lowell Commission, which oversaw the city's interests in the park, to come to Dayton a few times to advise them on the Dayton effort. In the words of Gerald Sharkey, a major advocate for Dayton's national park, "His response, and others from the Park Service looking at West Dayton, was: 'West Dayton looks like the Riviera compared to Lowell when we started.' And that was music to our ears." Lowell NHP's enabling legislation also served as the starting point for Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's enabling legislation.⁵⁰

Dayton was not the only deindustrializing city that found inspiration in Lowell NHP. Steamtown National Historic Site, in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and Keweenaw National Historic Site, on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, were other early examples of economically depressed areas that turned their industrial past (railroads and copper mining, respectively) into contemporary renewal with the help of the National Park Service. Others followed. Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park in Paterson, New Jersey, was established in 2011; Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park, a former national heritage area in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, became a national park unit in

⁴⁹ Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 65–66; Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006); Cathy Stanton, "The Past as a Public Good: The US National Park Service and 'Cultural Repair' in Post-Industrial Places," in *People and Their Pasts: Public History Today*, ed. Paul Ashton and Hilda Kean (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 57–73; National Park Service Stewardship Institute, "Urban Agenda," 16. Mackintosh et al. make the argument that Springfield Armory National Historic Site, established in 1974, was the NPS's first industrial site. I have chosen to give that designation to Lowell, because it is the better known example and is more representative of the NPS trend of moving away from its traditional base of military and political history. Although Springfield Armory has an industrial aspect to it, it is also a military history site, so it represents the new NPS approach less definitively.

⁵⁰ Tillson, Oral History, 6; Jerry Sharkey, Oral History II, interview by Ann Deines, February 23, 1996, 57–59, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library. For individual impressions from the Lowell visit, see "2003 Fund Committee National Park Sub-Committee Meeting Minutes," November 28, 1989, folder 1, box 19, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections. For a side-by-side comparison of the structures of Lowell NHP and Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, see Don Castleberry to Dale Bumpers, "Letter to Dale Bumpers," March 16, 1992, 4–5, folder "Wright Brothers 1," MWR [Midwest Regional] Park Creation Files, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

2014; and Pullman National Monument in Chicago, encompassing the history of the first African American labor union and the way it improved workers' lives, was designated by President Barack Obama in 2015.⁵¹

The idea of using national park designations as a means of urban renewal has obvious appeal for local communities and equally obvious drawbacks for the National Park Service. The agency is not responsible for urban renewal; this is the domain not of the Department of the Interior but of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Nevertheless, the issue is not, in fact, as clear-cut as it may at first seem. Industrial and labor history is an essential component of the nation's history. The United States simply would not possess its history of global dominance without the economic power wrought by industrial manufacturing. In reality, the line between renovating significant historical resources and renewing economically failing areas is not so obvious as one might think.⁵² For various other reasons as well, the NPS has often involved itself with local economic development through the designation of new NPS units. In the course of answering congressional questions about the proposed legislation to create Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, for example, NPS Midwest Regional Director Don Castleberry wrote: "Numerous examples exist of historic preservation and recreation development projects at National Park sites in disadvantaged neighborhoods which have been successful. Inner city decay around many NPS sites often turns around with the presence of park developments serving as a catalyst. Tourism, upgrading of neighborhood recognition and appreciation, rehabilitation of infrastructure (often privately owned), and development of associated businesses have resulted in some communities."⁵³

Castleberry then went on to list fourteen examples of NPS units that had been established in economically challenged areas and that had been "successful." These included Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine in Baltimore, Women's Rights NHP in Rochester, and Martin Luther King National Historic Site in Atlanta.⁵⁴ More recently, the NPS seemed to be fully embracing this dual mission of historic preservation and economic development in its urban initiative. Regarding Lowell National Historical Park, the agency stated: "The vast improvement in community pride and self-confidence is evident in the many initiatives that have revitalized this city—characteristics that were in short supply when the Park was authorized by Congress in

⁵¹ Mackintosh, McDonnell, and Sprinkle, *The National Parks*, 2018, 108–11; Morath, "A Park for Everyone," 18.

⁵² For a deeper analysis of this issue, see Seth C. Bruggeman, *Lost on the Freedom Trail: The National Park Service and Urban Renewal in Postwar Boston* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2022).

⁵³ Castleberry to Bumpers, "Letter to Dale Bumpers," March 16, 1992, 6.

⁵⁴ Castleberry to Bumpers, 7.

1978. In addition to the preservation and rehabilitation of Lowell's infrastructure, programmatic partnerships in cultural heritage, education, and tourism have also been important to Lowell's economic development."⁵⁵

Whether or not the NPS intended to involve itself with urban renewal, it is clear that, in the case of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP and myriad other deindustrializing cities at the turn of the twenty-first century, local advocates understood their efforts to attract the NPS within this context. Whether or not NPS representatives intended for it to happen, this brief synopsis indicates that it is a role the agency has repeatedly fallen into. Understanding the larger context of this pattern within urban areas will illuminate for the agency ways in which it has, wittingly or unwittingly, served an urban renewal function within the turn-of-the-twenty-first-century urban landscape.

⁵⁵ National Park Service Stewardship Institute, "Urban Agenda," 16.

Creating a Culture of Collaboration

The goal of collaborating with other institutions has been apparent within the National Park Service since at least the 1990s, when NPS Director James Ridenour promoted the idea of partnership parks. Partnership parks are “park units owned and/or managed in a partnership between the National Park Service and outside entities in the federal, tribal, state, local, or private sectors.” Such partnerships allow for cost sharing by all parties and in some cases provide the ability for the NPS to interpret and make accessible natural and cultural resources located on highly valuable land, such as in large cities or on waterfronts.⁵⁶

Although there is a much longer precedent of the National Park Service entering into partnerships with Indigenous nations to manage sites with Indigenous cultural significance, partnership parks have become much more common within the agency in the last thirty years. In this, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, designated under the George H. W. Bush administration, was an early example of a growing trend. In the subsequent three administrations (Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama), nearly half of the units added to the national park system were partnership parks.⁵⁷

Although the rhetoric of partnership parks originally centered on their economic benefits to the agency, over time, the park service has also begun to emphasize the possibilities for creative solutions that can come from the NPS partnering with other organizations. With this idea in mind, the 2015 Urban Agenda named “Creating a Culture of Collaboration” as one of its three goals, and this lingo has spread to other parts of the agency. As the agenda put it, “Collaboration is important everywhere, but the density and social complexity in urban areas make it imperative.”⁵⁸

Collaboration extends far beyond legislated partnerships. With the partnerships outlined in legislation, a park unit is in a sense “shared” between organizations, one of which is the NPS. In contrast, the idea of collaboration is much more encompassing, including all relationships with outside groups. It can include legislated partners as well partnerships that apply to only one or two programs within a specific park. The more recent idea of a culture of collaboration, then, is a much wider vision than simply partnership parks.

This latest incarnation of working with others provides multiple advantages for the park service. For one, it works against the tendency toward insularity that comes with a large agency where people tend to spend their whole careers. Collaborating with outside organizations exposes NPS staff to new ways of doing things, different approaches to common challenges, and fresh perspectives on audiences and stakeholders. Within agency literature,

⁵⁶ Comay, *National Park Service: Partnership Parks*, i, 2.

⁵⁷ Comay, 1.

⁵⁸ National Park Service Stewardship Institute, “Urban Agenda,” 27; Ronald W. Johnson, “The Success of Planning Partnerships: Three National Park Service Case Studies,” *George Wright Forum* 19, no. 1 (2002): 79–91; Elizabeth E. Perry, Daniel H. Krymkowski, and Robert E. Manning, “Brokers of Relevance in National Park Service Urban Collaborative Networks,” *Ecology and Society (Ottawa)* 24, no. 4 (December 2019).

collaboration is framed as an integral part of relevance. Working with local organizations in a given community provides an “on-the-ground” perspective of local issues and opportunities. It is also an essential component of building trust with potential audiences who may be suspicious of the federal government. Partnership with a trusted local group can provide a sort of vetting that can reassure underrepresented communities that they are in fact welcome and that their specific interests and needs have been considered.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Although it is a small park unit in terms of visitation, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP has embodied numerous trends of its parent agency. For the span of the park’s existence, the NPS has been emphasizing the need to stay relevant in a changing America. Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP has served as a testing ground for numerous facets of that effort, specifically serving as an urban presence for the agency; telling the underrepresented stories of African American arts and letters and of the country’s industrial past; and creating a culture of collaboration among its many partners, both legislated and informal.

⁵⁹ Diamant, “An Urban Parks Agenda for Everyone?,” 109; National Park Service Stewardship Institute, “Urban Agenda,” 15.

CHAPTER THREE

The Beginnings of Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park

By 1980, the Dayton economy was floundering, as were most of the manufacturing economies of the upper Midwest. National Cash Register, a major area employer throughout the twentieth century, had reduced its workforce by 16,000 in the preceding decade. The city had lost a total of 23,500 manufacturing jobs from 1970 to 1974 alone. City unemployment rates in the winter of 1977 (January–March) hovered around 10 percent.¹ A proposed interstate highway bypass around the city was causing local controversy. Residents of Dayton’s suburbs generally supported the proposal, while the city of Dayton, both residents and the government, saw the proposed construction as further contributing to the city’s economic decline.²

Amid this economic climate, an editorial by Arnold Rosenfeld appeared in the March 23, 1980, issue of the *Dayton Daily News* calling for a concerted effort to resuscitate the local economy. Rosenfeld stated, “Let’s get together a community conference to design an area-wide strategy for economic development.” The Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission (MVRPC) task force on economic issues heeded the call, convening an area economic development conference, cosponsored by the local Chamber of Commerce, on November 18–19, 1980.³

It was at this conference that the idea of preserving Dayton’s aviation heritage first began. This chapter details early attempts to document the city’s aviation history, efforts to preserve the relevant sites, and initial investigations by the National Park Service. Throughout this period, the goal of using Dayton’s past to resuscitate the local economy was never far from the minds of local advocates.

¹ City of Dayton Department of Planning, “Vertical File: Community Development Plan” (Dayton: City of Dayton, March 1980), 19–21, Vertical File: Dayton-Urban Development, Dayton Metro Library Local History Room.

² Aviation Trail, Inc., “History of Aviation Trail, Inc.” (May 12, 1999), folder 2, box 3, George “JR” Wedekind Jr. Aviation Collection, Wright State University Special Collections.

³ Aviation Trail, Inc.

Creating the Aviation Trail

Former teacher and county administrator Gerald “Jerry” Sharkey (who happened to be afraid of flying) was among the invited attendees at the November 1980 conference.⁴ During a conference brainstorming session, Sharkey proposed that the community “sort of link existing aviation sites.”⁵ In the 1980s, tourists came to see individual aviation sites—such as the US Air Force Museum (now the National Museum of the US Air Force) or the 1905 Wright Flyer III—without visiting any other aviation attractions. An Aviation Trail would “give people a way to go from site to site,” like Boston’s Freedom Trail, and encourage visitors to explore and stay in the area.⁶ More importantly, Sharkey hoped the trail would “encourage redevelopment in the inner west Dayton neighborhood.”⁷

Initially, the idea met with skepticism from both reporters and conference facilitators. Before 1980, local commemoration of the Wright brothers had been somewhat spotty. In the 1930s, while Orville Wright was still living, Henry Ford purchased the Wrights’ former family home at 7 Hawthorn Street along with their last bicycle shop at 1127 W. Third Street, where the first planes had been built. Ford moved both buildings to his newly created Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, filling them with the Wrights’ tools and original family pieces. In 1940, a lone monument was built on a hill near Huffman Prairie, the location of the Wright brothers’ test flights that led to the first practical airplane, capable of heavier-than-air, controlled flight. Just before his death in 1948, Orville Wright helped rebuild the 1905 Wright Flyer III and design Wright Hall to house it at Carillon Historical Park, which was opened in 1950.⁸ Over time, four other Wright brothers’ bicycle shops disappeared—two torn down, one built over, and one destroyed by fire.⁹

Given this background, the conference facilitators’ initially lukewarm reaction was understandable. However, other attendees at the economic development conference latched onto Sharkey’s idea. With the support of Mary Ann Johnson, an economic planner with MVRPC, and John Dussault, an executive with McCauley Propeller, the conference

⁴ “Gerald Shea Sharkey Obituary,” *Dayton Daily News*, April 8, 2014, <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/dayton/name/gerald-sharkey-obituary?pid=170539692>.

⁵ Jerry Sharkey, Oral History I, interview by Ann Deines, February 16, 1996, 1–4, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library, quotation from 3.

⁶ Michael J. McManus, “Dayton Experiences Rebirth,” *Kokomo Tribune*, December 14, 1980. On the history of Boston’s Freedom Trail and its ties to urban renewal in that city, see Seth C. Bruggeman, *Lost on the Freedom Trail: The National Park Service and Urban Renewal in Postwar Boston* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2022).

⁷ Mary Kane, “A Dayton Tour Spotlights Wright Brothers’ History,” *United Press International*, August 7, 1984.

⁸ Tom D. Crouch, *The Bishop’s Boys: A Life of Wilbur and Orville Wright* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 507–10; Charles Harvard Gibbs-Smith, “The World’s First Practical Aeroplane” (September 1971), 3, folder 3, box 18, Aviation Trail, Inc., Papers, Wright State University Special Collections.

⁹ Edward Roach, Comments on the Second Draft of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted via email to Susan Ferentinos, February 15, 2022.

voted to work on the aviation trail plan. After the conference, with some seed money from the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, Sharkey, Johnson, and Dussault formed Aviation Trail, Inc. (ATI). The group held an inaugural tour of aviation sites in July 1981 and incorporated as a nonprofit organization the following month. Dussault served as the first president of the organization.¹⁰

At roughly this same time, avocational historians Fred Fisk and Marlin Todd published an article in 1980 that included a previously unknown photograph of the Wright Cycle Company at 22 South Williams Street in West Dayton. Mary Ann Johnson was at that time researching local sites related to aviation for a guidebook she was writing. She realized that the building was still standing, although in bad condition. Johnson also identified the Hoover Block, two doors down from the extant cycle shop as the site of the Wrights' printing company from 1890 to 1895. (The buildings separating the cycle shop and the Hoover Block were later demolished to create Wright-Dunbar Plaza.¹¹) Johnson's guidebook was ultimately published in 1986 as *A Field Guide to Flight: On the Aviation Trail in Dayton, Ohio*. It became an indispensable resource for all the various parties involved in preserving Dayton's aviation heritage.¹²

ATI decided to buy the Wright Cycle Company building and the Hoover Block. They offered the owner of the former cycle shop \$10,000, twice what a realtor estimated the property to be worth, in an effort to "get off on the right foot" with the neighbors.¹³ However, the group did not actually have these funds available, so one ATI member, physician Jerry Meyer, offered to buy the building through his investment company. He held the property until ATI was able to acquire the funds to purchase it from him. ATI secured \$5,000 from the city of Dayton and another \$5,000 from Montgomery County, and was able to purchase the building from Meyer in 1983.¹⁴

¹⁰ Aviation Trail, Inc., "History of Aviation Trail, Inc."; Kane, "A Dayton Tour Spotlights Wright Brothers' History"; Sharkey, Oral History I, 4–5; Mary Ann Johnson, Oral History, interview by Ann Deines, February 21, 1996, 1–2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

¹¹ Johnson, Oral History, 6–7; Montgomery County Recorder of Deeds, "Deed Record R72-08601-0060" (Dayton, July 27, 1983), 3, folder 14, box 1, Bill Gibson Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Mary K. Grassick, "Historic Furnishings Report: Print Shop, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, Dayton, Ohio" (Harpers Ferry, WV: National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center, 2007), 3, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/daav/print_shop_hfr.pdf; Quinn Evans/Architects; "Historic Structure Report: Hoover Block (HS-02): Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park" (Ann Arbor, MI, January 1999), 11–12, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library. According to Fred Fisk, Ivonette Miller, niece of the Wright brothers, "told a friend who told Mary Ann Johnson" about the photo and the building after reading Fisk's article. Fisk takes credit for saving the building. Fred C. Fisk and Marlin W. Todd, *The Wright Brothers: From Bicycle to Biplane* (West Milton, OH: Miami Graphic Services Inc., 1990), 43, photo on 49.

¹² Mary Ann Johnson, *A Field Guide to Flight: On the Aviation Trail in Dayton, Ohio* (Dayton: Landfall Press, 1996); Ron Cockrell, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

¹³ Sharkey, Oral History I, 7–9.

¹⁴ Sharkey, 7–11; Montgomery County Recorder of Deeds, "Deed Record R72-08601-0060"; Johnson, Oral History, 17.

The Hoover Block proved equally difficult to acquire. ATI again lacked the funds. Fortunately, they were able to secure a loan of \$30,000 from the Dayton City-Wide Development Corporation to buy the property.¹⁵ The seller sold the property on the condition that ATI would also acquire the adjacent Setzer Building. The Setzer Building did not have historical significance or a connection to the Wright brothers, but ATI accepted the terms of the sale.¹⁶

In addition to working on the specific Wright-related buildings, ATI quickly realized that much of the neighborhood surrounding these buildings remained as it had been when the Wrights lived there. An idea slowly formed that the entire neighborhood could be an aviation attraction. Sharkey credited historian Tom Crouch, a curator with the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum—and a Dayton native—with drawing his attention to the significance of the neighborhood. He paraphrased Crouch’s comments: “If the Wright brothers were here, they would still feel very comfortable. This is their neighborhood. . . . This is where they lived and worked.”¹⁷ With money from the state and volunteer labor, ATI renovated the Cycle Company and opened it as a museum in 1988.¹⁸

¹⁵ Aviation Trail, Inc., “Aviation Trail: A Brief History 1981–1982,” n.d., 2, folder 13, box 1, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections.

¹⁶ Steve Brown, Oral History, interview by Casey Huegel, January 13, 2016, 4, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

¹⁷ Sharkey, Oral History I, 19–20, 25–29; Tom D. Crouch, *The Bishop’s Boys: A Life of Wilbur and Orville Wright* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 100; Ron Cockrell, Historian, Midwest Region to Files, “Memorandum: Wright-Brothers/Paul Laurence Dunbar Properties and Discussions with Aviation Trails, Incorporated, Members in Dayton, Montgomery County, Ohio,” May 10, 1989, 6, folder 11, box 2, Bill Gibson Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; National Park Service, “Study of Alternatives: Dayton’s Aviation Heritage, Ohio” (Omaha: US Department of the Interior, 1991), 14, National Park Service Electronic Technical Information Center, <https://pubs.nps.gov>, https://pubs.nps.gov/eTIC/COLO-DEVA/DAAV_362_D2_0001_of_0070.pdf; Montgomery County Recorder of Deeds, “Deed Record R72-08601-0060.” Citywide Development helped ATI buy the Hoover Block. .

¹⁸ Sharkey, Oral History I, 25–27; Kane, “A Dayton Tour Spotlights Wright Brothers’ History”; National Park Service, “Study of Alternatives: Dayton’s Aviation Heritage, Ohio,” 1; Associated Press, “Funds Sought for Wright Building,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, March 9, 1988; “State Money Did Not Roll Dayton’s Way This Time,” *Dayton Daily News*, March 11, 1990.; Edward Roach, Comments on Draft 2 of Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.



The Wright Cycle Shop in 1985, before restoration. Image: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

ATI's plans for preserving both buildings and the surrounding neighborhood were at odds with the city of Dayton. The city had decided to demolish the building at 22 S. Williams, as part of its effort to clear the area for new development. ATI's desire to save the building, and the neighborhood along with it, "was just in the teeth of what they [the city] wanted to do." The city agreed to spare the bicycle shop but was undeterred in its plans to demolish other neighborhood buildings. In dueling press conferences, Sharkey and the city announced their competing plans, prompting a "broader battle" over the neighborhood.¹⁹

Regarding plans for the rest of the neighborhood, Sharkey, along with sympathetic ATI members and community leaders such as Brad Tillson, editor of the *Dayton Daily News*, and federal judge Walter Rice, formed a "short-term group, just to sort of look at...is the broader area worth saving?" After discussing the merits of the area and the feasibility of preserving an entire neighborhood, the group decided to pursue a new goal, putting the West Third Street business corridor that ran through the Wright's neighborhood onto the

¹⁹ Sharkey, Oral History I, 11–12, 21–22.

National Register of Historic Places.²⁰ The group engaged local historian Loren S. Gannon Jr. to prepare the National Register nomination, and the West Third Street Historic District was added to the register in 1988.²¹

Unsurprisingly, the city initially opposed the group's efforts. With support from the newspaper, likely led by editor Tillson, the "ad hoc group" garnered public support for preserving the neighborhood. Cartoonist Mike Peters drew a timely cartoon depicting a bus driving through a demolished West Dayton. He captioned the cartoon, "this pile of bricks was where the Wright brothers lived, and this pile. . . ." The cartoon powerfully illustrated the loss to Dayton history if the city allowed the demolition of the buildings.²² The community and the city slowly began to see the value in preserving the sites and the neighborhood.

At the same time, the cost of adequately preserving the sites related to the Wright brothers seemed beyond local capacity, and some in the community began considering the possibility of assistance—both technical and financial—from the National Park Service (NPS). Fred Bartenstein, executive director of the Dayton Foundation, distributed a letter calling for a national park at Huffman Prairie Flying Field.²³ Sharkey brought up the idea of NPS involvement at a town hall meeting, and the idea gained the attention of a columnist for the *Dayton Daily News*. Hap Cawood quoted Sharkey in a column, adding that it was a great idea for the community.²⁴ Not all members of ATI agreed with the idea of pursuing national park status, however, so those who were interested decided to pursue the idea outside of ATI channels.

Creating the 2003 Fund Committee

According to Tillson's recollection, the group discussing the idea of involving the NPS was initially just he, Sharkey, and Rice, but eventually others joined them. "Rick Helwig, who was City Manager was involved. Very early on, the base commander got involved [name

²⁰ Walter Rice, Oral History, interview by Ann Deines, March 6, 1996, 1–4; Sharkey, Oral History I, 31–32; Tillson became editor of the paper in 1984 and publisher in 1988. See Adam Becker, *Finding Aid: Brad Tillson Inventing Flight Collection*, MS-483 (Dayton: Wright State University Special Collections, 2014), <https://www.libraries.wright.edu/special/collectionguides/files/ms483.pdf>.

²¹ Loren S. Gannon Jr., "West Third Street, Dayton, OH," National Register of Historic Places District Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1989), <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/71990545>.

²² Sharkey recounted the cartoon. Sharkey, Oral History I, 31–33.

²³ Sharkey, 42–43.

²⁴ Brad Tillson, Oral History, interview by Ann Deines, February 29, 1996, 3. Sharkey often receives credit from other members of the 2003 Fund Committee for the national park idea. He, on the other hand, credited Tom Sheets, the father of one of Sharkey's former students at Carroll High School. Meanwhile, Bartenstein had already proposed a national park for Huffman Prairie. Sharkey, Oral History I, 40.

not given] and we really just started picking up people. Wick Wright [a descendent of the Wright brothers], Mary Mathews [executive director of Carillon Historical Park], various folks who had an interest kind of came to the table.”²⁵

As the group became more serious about pursuing NPS assistance in preparation for the 2003 centennial of the Wright brothers’ first flight, they decided to form an official organization. In November 1989, Rice formally incorporated the group as the 2003 Fund Committee, in reference to the upcoming anniversary.²⁶ Despite the group’s agreement that a national park unit was “the ultimate goal,” the incorporation papers of the 2003 Fund Committee do not reference a national park. Instead, its stated purpose was to organize a celebration in Dayton for the one hundredth anniversary of the Wright brothers’ first flight. The key was to make Dayton the center of the anniversary (even though the 1903 “first flight” had taken place in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina) and bring economic development to the area. A national park furthered that larger goal.²⁷

The group had already reached out to the park service by the time they incorporated. In the late 1980s, Sharkey first reached out to Congressman Tony Hall’s district office in Dayton. He visited the office with a letter that “asked very officially on behalf of Aviation Trail the question, ‘How does one go about creating a national park?’” The district office, headed by Madeline Iseli, reached out to Hall’s Washington office.²⁸

Sharkey traveled to Washington, DC, to gauge the government’s interest. He met with Representative Hall and the Smithsonian-affiliated historian Tom Crouch. After their initial meeting, Hall was intrigued. Crouch already thought that at least Huffman Prairie Flying Field had the potential to be designated a unit of the NPS. One of Hall’s staffers, Michael Gessel, was particularly interested and pointed Sharkey to Don Castleberry, the regional director of the Midwest Region of the NPS. Upon returning to Dayton, Sharkey called Castleberry and explained his idea for a national park. Sharkey claimed he could “hear the excitement in [Castleberry’s] voice.”²⁹

²⁵ Tillson, Oral History, 4.

²⁶ Sharkey, Oral History I, 45. In memoranda prior to incorporation, Bill Gibson referred to the group’s meetings as the Dayton Task Force for the Wright Brothers. William Gibson to Associate Regional Director, Planning and Resources Preservation Midwest Region, “Wright Brothers Task Force Meeting #10,” September 15, 1989, folder “Wright Brothers 2,” MWR [Midwest Regional] Park Creation Files, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Tillson, Oral History, 16–19; Aviation Trail, Inc., “History of Aviation Trail, Inc.,” “2003 Fund, Inc. Articles of Incorporation” (Ohio Secretary of State, November 24, 1989), https://bizimage.ohiosos.gov/api/image/pdf/G749_0692.

²⁷ Tillson, Oral History, 1–4, 12–13; Sharkey, Oral History I, 45; Rice, Oral History, 3; Mary Mathews, Oral History, interview by Edward Roach, October 6, 2006, 2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

²⁸ Oral History of Madeline Iseli, interview by Ed Roach, September 9, 2005, 2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library. When working for Hall and when she first began working with the 2003 Fund Committee, Iseli went by the name Iseli-Smith.

²⁹ Jerry Sharkey, Oral History II, interview by Ann Deines, February 23, 1996, 45–47, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library, quotation from 46.

National Park Service Involvement

Castleberry was intrigued enough to send a member of the NPS regional history division, Ron Cockrell, to conduct preliminary investigations into the aviation resources in Dayton in May 1989. In Cockrell's recollection, he was "the first National Park Service professional sent to Dayton to meet the ATI group and conduct a preliminary evaluation of the various historic properties." While in Dayton, Cockrell toured several Wright sites, including Hawthorn Hill (Orville Wright's "success mansion"), Huffman Prairie Flying Field, and the Wright Cycle Company building at 22 South Williams St., as well as the Paul Laurence Dunbar House. He advised the Dayton advocates about the process of becoming a unit of the National Park Service and produced a detailed report of his trip for the staff back at the NPS regional office in Omaha.³⁰

Cockrell's report of the trip offers a glimpse of the situation in Dayton before the NPS became substantially involved. It reveals some initial reluctance on the part of the US Air Force to collaborate with the NPS, while also demonstrating a preexisting air force commitment to preserve and interpret Huffman Prairie Flying Field. The report states that Leon Glaspell, assistant to the Wright-Patterson base commander and Cockrell's tour guide, "expressed some doubt as to why the USAF [US Air Force] would want Huffman Prairie designated a National Historic Landmark since it is already on the National Register. Jerry Sharkey has had to calm USAF fears about NPS involvement."³¹ However, Cockrell also noted:

Concurrent with ATI's proposal 6 months ago to approach the NPS, the USAF has initiated plans to provide the public with better interpretation of Huffman Prairie. The week I was in Dayton, USAF sent its historian and an engineer to Wright Brothers National memorial, North Carolina, to evaluate NPS interpretive programs there. In the next several months, USAF will produce an Environmental Assessment on the alternatives which they are still in the process of identifying. Some of them include building an interpretive center, a trail outlining the circular pattern of the test flights, and an exhibit on the interurban railroad (leading to Dayton) at a reconstructed station with cars on display.³²

³⁰ Aviation Trail, Inc., "National Park Service Itinerary" (May 1989), folder 11, box 19, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections; Ron Cockrell, Comments to Draft 2 of the Dayton Administrative History National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

³¹ Ron Cockrell, Historian, Midwest Region to Associate Regional Director, Planning and Resources Preservation, Midwest Region, "Memorandum: Trip Report, Columbus and Dayton, Ohio, May 1 to 5," May 10, 1989, 2, folder 11, box 2, Bill Gibson Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

³² Cockrell, Historian, Midwest Region to Files, "Memorandum: Wright-Brothers/Paul Laurence Dunbar Properties," May 10, 1989, 4-5.

The report also notes park advocates' economic motives and their concern for the citizens of West Dayton. It states:

Originally, ATI did not see itself as an organization dedicated to historic preservation, although it certainly has evolved into that. Their primary motivation was economic. The group recognized an economic advantage in promoting and developing Dayton's historic sites, thereby encouraging tourism and related economic development. There is also a socio-economic aspect. The "Wright-Dunbar Village" area is in a declining area west of downtown Dayton populated by African Americans. ATI wants to revitalize the neighborhood and bolster the black community's confidence in their city. Because ATI's early support originated from the black community, ATI feels a deep responsibility to maintain the Wright-Dunbar association as a "package deal."³³

Cockrell concluded his report by recommending that the NPS conduct further research and prepare a "National Historic Landmark study/nomination" for the properties in Dayton.³⁴ MWRO officials agreed, and a larger team of NPS professionals from the NPS regional office arrived later that month (May 1989) to assess the historic significance of Dayton's resources and their suitability for National Historic Landmark (NHL) status. A landmark study is not a common part of initial NPS investigation of potential national park units, but it seems to have served a purpose similar to a special resource study, more commonly used by the NPS to evaluate historical significance of resources under consideration for inclusion in the National Park System.³⁵

The decision to conduct a landmark study was made a week after Cockrell's return to Omaha, suggesting the potential the NPS saw for the Dayton resources. The larger NPS team toured Dayton May 22–26, 1989, and was composed of historian Jill O'Bright, historical architect William Harlow, and seasonal historian Dave Richardson. While in the area, the team evaluated thirty-three sites. Ultimately, the report recommended that seven Dayton sites be nominated as NHLs for their association with aviation history. These sites were the Wright Cycle Company building, the Hoover Block, Wright Flyer III, Huffman Prairie Flying Field, Hawthorn Hill, Buildings 1 and 2 of the Wright Company, and the Wright Seaplane base. The team then began working on the NHL nominations for these properties.³⁶

³³ Cockrell, Historian, Midwest Region to Files, 1.

³⁴ Cockrell, Historian, Midwest Region to Associate Regional Director, Planning and Resources Preservation, Midwest Region, "Memorandum: Trip Report," May 10, 1989, 3.

³⁵ Aviation Trail, Inc., "National Park Service Itinerary."

³⁶ The study of alternatives states that ATI requested the landmark study. National Park Service, "Study of Alternatives: Dayton's Aviation Heritage, Ohio," iii; "Brief History of Aviation Trail," n.d., folder 4, box 1, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections; Aviation Trail, Inc., "National Park Service Itinerary," 1–3; Task Directive: National Historic Landmarks Study, Wright Brothers/Aviation Related Resources, Dayton, Ohio, appended to Jill O'Bright, David G. Richardson, and William S. Harlow, "Wright Cycle Company and Wright and Wright Printing," National Historic Landmark Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1990), <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/71986526>.

In the course of working on the NHL nominations, the MWRO historians encountered some disagreement with the NHL staff at the NPS national office in Washington, DC. Minutes from the national park subcommittee of the 2003 Fund Committee describe the disagreement as follows: “A senior historian in Washington D.C. believes that only sites involved with the development of flight should be listed. This would limit the landmark sites to one or two. The Omaha office of the NPS takes a wider view that the seven sites connected to the invention of flight should be nominated. It is hoped that the historian from the Omaha office will make the presentation to the [NHL?] Advisory Council who will make the final decision.”³⁷

Ultimately, of the seven sites considered, the US Secretary of the Interior bestowed NHL status on four: the Wright Cycle Company building, Hawthorn Hill, Huffman Prairie Flying Field, and the Wright Flyer III. The Wright Seaplane base lacked sufficient historical integrity, and the Hoover Block was determined to lack national historical significance. Park memory holds that the owners of the Wright Company factory buildings opposed NHL documentation, although committee minutes from the time indicate that General Motors, the parent company of building owners Delco, supported the nomination. Thus the reason the factory buildings did not become an NHL remains unclear.³⁸

³⁷ “2003 Fund Committee National Park Sub-Committee Meeting #4 Minutes,” January 16, 1990, folder 2, box 19, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections.

³⁸ Edward Roach, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022; “2003 Fund Committee National Park Sub-Committee Meeting Minutes,” March 20, 1990, folder 2, box 19, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections.



The Hoover Block, now home to the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center, as it appeared in 1995 before rehabilitation. Image: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

Meanwhile, Cockrell’s initial trip to Dayton also resulted in William “Bill” Gibson, superintendent of Mound City Group National Monument (now Hopewell Cultural National Historical Park) in Chillicothe, Ohio, getting involved with on-the-ground developments in Dayton, ninety miles away. He began regularly attending meetings of the 2003 Fund Committee and being on hand when NPS colleagues were in town conducting research. Gibson did this in his capacity as the NPS liaison in the state of Ohio, representing the agency when needed. In Gibson’s words: “A series of visits over the period of a year a half consisted of meetings with community leaders of Aviation Trail [Inc.] and the city. The group of people interested in preserving the heritage, and they had a vague idea that they wanted the National Park Service to do it. We began conversations and an endless series of meetings, increasing frequency, increasing number of interested people, and we evolved a couple of understandings, and it began with a new area study of the resources in Dayton.”³⁹

³⁹ William Gibson, Oral History 2007, interview by Ed Roach and Ann Honious, April 17, 2007, 2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

A memo from Gibson to the NPS Midwest Regional Office dated August 4, 1989, reports on “Wright Brothers Task Force Meetings #6, #7, #8” and indicates that the group—which would officially become the 2003 Fund Committee in November 1989—was then meeting weekly and that Gibson was in attendance at least since the July 20, 1989, meeting.⁴⁰

The swift involvement of various NPS professionals was a promising sign for the local Dayton advocates. Nevertheless, from the beginning, the future 2003 Fund Committee envisioned a collaboration with the park service, rather than a full relinquishment of control. They wanted the NPS’s technical expertise and resources but wanted the Wright brothers’ sites to remain community-controlled spaces. “It was never our idea,” Tillson recalled, “that we would just turn this over to the federal government.” NPS would help, but the community would remain in charge.⁴¹

Despite the committee’s continued hopes for self-determination, in reviewing documents from Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park’s founding era, the particular interest taken by key figures in the NPS leadership structure stands out. Don Castleberry, NPS Midwest Regional Director, “loved the Wrights, he loved Dunbar, he loved the friendship between the two of them.” By Sharkey’s account, his initial informal call to the NPS framed the park as not only about the Wright brothers and aviation, but also about their friendship with famed African American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, another Dayton native. Their friendship was “the key to Don Castleberry’s initial interest.” Castleberry acknowledged the lack of diversity in the national park system. A park including the legendary African American poet offered an opportunity to move beyond European American stories.⁴²

Likewise, a 1989 internal NPS memo comments on “a very supportive view of this project, held by NPS Chief Historian Ed Bearrs.”⁴³ Castleberry, as head of the NPS Midwest Region, based in Omaha, Nebraska, and Bearrs, as head of the NPS History Division, based in Washington, DC, were located in two very different chains of command within the agency. It is likely that they were reaching their favorable assessments independently of each other.

⁴⁰ William Gibson to Associate Regional Director, Planning and Resources Preservation Midwest Region, “Wright Brothers Task Force Meetings #6, #7, #8,” August 4, 1989, folder “Wright Brothers 2,” MWR [Midwest Regional] Park Creation Files, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁴¹ Tillson, Oral History, 7. The Ohio Historical Society in particular wanted to retain their “administrative independence.” Gibson, Oral History 2007, 5–6.

⁴² Sharkey, Oral History I, 46, 49, 51; Mathews, Oral History, 2. Bill Gibson reiterated Castleberry’s interest in the Wright-Dunbar connection. Gibson, Oral History 2007, 6.

⁴³ Gibson to Associate Regional Director, Planning and Resources Preservation Midwest Region, “Wright Brothers Task Force Meeting #10,” September 15, 1989.

Still more noteworthy, the overarching director of the National Park Service, James Ridenour, personally visited Dayton on more than one occasion before the national park unit was even authorized. The director's first visit related to the idea of a national park unit occurred in July 1989, when he flew to Dayton to attend a conference and sat in on a meeting of the future 2003 Fund Committee, which was also attended by the commanding officer of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, the Ohio State Historic Preservation Officer, and a representative from Congressman Hall's office. According to Bill Gibson, "The Director was interested and supportive, suggesting the group decide what type management [it] thought appropriate, and what degree, if any, Federal participation was necessary."⁴⁴

Ridenour returned to Dayton in October 1990, to attend the NHL dedication ceremony of Huffman Prairie Flying Field, the Wright Flyer III, and the Wright Cycle Company. This event was held at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, and base commander Colonel William B. Orellana served as the master of ceremonies. Ridenour made the "National Landmark Presentations." Wilkinson "Wick" Wright (a Wright brothers' descendant), US Representative Tony Hall, and US Representative Mike DeWine also spoke at the event. The ceremony concluded with an aerial salute by the 906th Tactical Fighter Group.⁴⁵

Designating four sites as NHLs clearly demonstrated that the area had national significance, the first criterion for authorizing a new national park unit.⁴⁶ Since the Paul Laurence Dunbar House had been designated an NHL in 1962, the proposed park had five National Historic Landmarks. The NPS had also added the area around the Dunbar House and the West Third Street District (commonly, yet incorrectly, referred to as the Wright-Dunbar Historic District) to the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 and 1989, respectively. The documentation for the Dunbar Historic District included an updated statement of significance for Dunbar's house.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Gibson to Associate Regional Director, Planning and Resources Preservation Midwest Region, "Wright Brothers Task Force Meetings #6, #7, #8," August 4, 1989, 1.

⁴⁵ "National Historic Landmarks Ceremony Program" (Dayton, October 19, 1990), folder 6, box 17, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections.

⁴⁶ James Ridenour to Regional Directors, "Memorandum," United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, July 19, 1989, included in National Park Service, "Study of Alternatives: Dayton's Aviation Heritage, Ohio," 51-52.

⁴⁷ Loren S. Gannon Jr., "Dunbar Historic District, Dayton, OH," National Register of Historic Places District Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, June 30, 1980), <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/71990553>; Gannon Jr., "West Third Street District Nomination."

National Park Service Study of Alternatives

While O’Bright, Harlow, and Richardson worked on the NHL landmarks, the 2003 Fund Committee, Congressman Hall, and the NPS initiated a Study of Alternatives.⁴⁸ Although a study of alternatives is a required part of the process of becoming a unit of the NPS, this effort was unusual in that it was initiated by a private group and an individual member of Congress, rather than by an act of Congress.⁴⁹ Likewise, Montgomery and Greene counties, the city of Dayton, and the 2003 Fund Committee provided the funds for the study, estimated to be just over \$85,000, suggesting the faith local entities had in the potential of a national park unit to help the area’s fortunes.⁵⁰

Ronald “Ron” W. Johnson, a planner from the NPS Denver Service Center, would serve as team captain of the study, with assistance from other Denver Service Center colleagues: John C. Paige, Senior Planner/Cultural Resource Specialist; Paula Machlin, Landscape Architect; Jan Harris, Planner/Public Involvement Specialist; R. Michael Madell, Socioeconomic Specialist; Roberta McDougall, Interpretive Planner; and Mary McVeigh, Planning Technician. Other participants included Jill O’Bright, Regional Historian with MWRO; Bill Gibson, Superintendent of Mound City Group National Monument; and Jerry Sharkey from the 2003 Fund Committee. As Johnson described it, the study would weigh the merits of different approaches to interpreting, preserving, managing, and developing various aviation sites. Some of the proposed approaches would not include NPS involvement. The goal of the study was not to pick a management plan but to explore various options. It would draw on and expand the recent landmark study, focusing its efforts on the four recent National Historic Landmarks (Wright Cycle Company, the Wright Flyer III, Huffman Prairie Flying Field, and Hawthorn Hill), plus the Paul Laurence Dunbar House (an NHL since 1962) and the Hoover Block.⁵¹

⁴⁸ The Study of Alternatives matched the steps outlined for the addition of new park areas as described in the NPS Management Policies. The park did not have a Special Resource Study. National Park Service, “Management Policies” (US Department of the Interior, December 1988), <http://npshistory.com/publications/management/mgt-policies-1988.pdf>, chapter 2.1. The study was occasionally referred to as a Management Alternative Study. For example, see “Sub-Committee Meeting Minutes, March 20, 1990,” 2.

⁴⁹ Congress directed the NPS to prepare studies for other historical parks created around the same time, such as Cane River Creole National Historical Park. For example, see “Special Resource Study Environmental Assessment: Cane River, Louisiana” (US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Denver Service Center, June 1993), <http://npshistory.com/publications/cari/srs-ea.pdf>.

⁵⁰ National Park Service, “Study of Alternatives: Dayton’s Aviation Heritage, Ohio,” 44; Tony Hall, “Letter to James Ridenour,” July 31, 1989, folder “Wright Brothers 2,” MWR [Midwest Regional] Park Creation Files, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁵¹ Hall, “Letter to James Ridenour,” July 31, 1989; “Sub-Committee Meeting Minutes, March 20, 1990,” 1–2; Ronald W. Johnson, “Task Directive Dayton’s Aviation Heritage: A Study of Alternatives, Ohio Package No. MWRO DS33 15,” May 1990, 2–3, 5, folder: Wright Brothers 2, MWR [Midwest Regional] Park Creation Records, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library. Mary McVeigh was not listed in the initial Task Directive as a contributor. Her name appears on the final study. National Park Service, “Study of Alternatives: Dayton’s Aviation Heritage, Ohio,” 60.

The NPS began the alternatives study at the end of 1989, after meeting with the 2003 Fund Committee and “approximately 60 other community leaders, politicians, and citizens.” Other groups consulted on the study include the 2003 Fund Committee’s National Park Subcommittee, the Ohio State Historic Preservation Office, the Ohio Historical Society, Aviation Trail, Inc., Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, the National Museum of the US Air Force, and Carillon Historical Park. The cities of Dayton and Moraine participated, as did National Cash Register (then owner of Hawthorn Hill) and General Motors (then owner of the Wright Company factory buildings).⁵²

In May 1990, the 2003 Fund Committee and the NPS jointly sponsored a workshop to explore alternatives. Workshop participants included members of the committee, NPS representatives, and the owners and managers of relevant aviation sites. Workshop participants debated the merits of three interpretive themes, two subthemes, and four alternative historical approaches. Dunbar was minimally present in the draft presented at the workshop. Neither the key interpretive themes nor any of the subthemes identified for the park mention him. Instead, the themes focused entirely on the Wright brothers and aviation. The first theme highlighted the Wrights’ “unique upbringing and family life” as a key to their success. The second emphasized the importance of the scientific method in “solving the problem of controlled, sustained, heavier-than-air flight.” The third theme acknowledged that flight drastically changed modern life. Dunbar was also absent from the proposed subthemes, which argued the Wrights did not care for business and “social and economic conditions are some factors that helped establish Dayton as a center for creativity and invention.”⁵³

Dunbar did appear in two of the four initial alternatives. In alternative one, Dunbar and his historic home form part of the supportive “historic context” that produced the Wright brothers. The Dunbar House would “illustrate the life-style of the time period and the Wrights’ unique friendship with Dunbar.” Even the name indicates Dunbar’s secondary nature within the park. In choosing “West Dayton—Home of a Legend,” the creators conspicuously chose to only highlight one legend, rather than *legends*. The second alternative, entitled “The Wrights as People and Inventors,” similarly minimized Dunbar. His house again served to illustrate the time period in which the Wrights lived; Dunbar’s

⁵² Johnson, “Alternatives Task Directive,” 5; National Park Service, “Study of Alternatives: Dayton’s Aviation Heritage, Ohio,” 44.

⁵³ Ronald W. Johnson, Section Chief, Branch of Planning, Central Team and Manager, Central Team, Denver Service Center, “Memorandum: Trip Report, May 14–18, 1990,” May 29, 1990, folder: Wright Brothers 2, MWR [Midwest Regional] Park Creation Records, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; “Work Book Study of Alternatives: Dayton’s Aviation Heritage,” May 15, 1990, 5, National Park Service Electronic Technical Information Center, <https://pubs.nps.gov>. In the final version of the Study of Alternatives, the second subtheme became the fourth interpretive theme. National Park Service, “Study of Alternatives: Dayton’s Aviation Heritage, Ohio,” 22.

individual accomplishments were not mentioned. Dunbar was completely missing from alternatives three (“Aviation Heritage”) and four (“Innovation and Aviation”), though his exclusion was noted as a weakness of both.⁵⁴

Using feedback from the workshop, the final study of alternatives, released in 1991, presented three “conceptual alternatives.”⁵⁵ While alternatives one and two remained largely unchanged, the third alternative combined the third and fourth options from the workshop.⁵⁶ The first alternative, “West Dayton: Home of a Legend,” presented the Wrights and their plane as products of “the historical and physical context” of Dayton. The park would restore the area surrounding the Wright Cycle Company building and the Hoover Block in order to recreate the neighborhood that produced the brothers. It told “the Dayton story,” focusing on the brothers as people, rather than on aviation technology. Park sites would include the Dunbar National Historic District, the “Wright-Dunbar Historic District,” the Hoover Block, the Wright Cycle Company, the Wright Flyer III, and Huffman Prairie Flying Field. A visitor center would be built in West Dayton, along with a pedestrian path to connect the sites throughout the neighborhood.⁵⁷

The second alternative focused on the impact of aviation globally. Instead of recreating the Wrights’ neighborhood, the alternative, now titled “The Wrights as Inventors: Catalyst for World Change,” proposed dedicating resources to the National Museum of the US Air Force, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, and other sites along the Aviation Trail. Though the Hoover Block and the Wright Cycle Company building would be restored, the surrounding neighborhood would not. The park’s themes would emphasize the ways in which the Wright brothers changed the world outside of Dayton. Two centers would be built within the park. One, an interpretive center, would be built at Huffman Prairie and provide interpretation on “the technology and mechanics of flight.” The second, a visitor center, would likely be constructed in the Hoover Block. In addition to providing visitor services and orientation, this center would interpret the Wrights’ personal story.⁵⁸

The final alternative, “Innovation and Aviation: Dayton as a Major Technological Center,” situated the Wright brothers’ planes as a few of many inventions in aviation to come out of Dayton at the turn of the century. Interpretation would draw on existing sites but would also require new buildings throughout Dayton, including a proposed Aviation Hall of Fame downtown, a visitor center at Huffman Prairie Flying Field, and a visitor space in West Dayton. This alternative would also expand the facilities at Carillon

⁵⁴ “Work Book Study of Alternatives,” 6–8, 10–11, 12–13.

⁵⁵ “Work Book Study of Alternatives,” 23.

⁵⁶ The second subtheme from the workshop version became an interpretive theme in the final version. The first subtheme was omitted. National Park Service, “Study of Alternatives: Dayton’s Aviation Heritage, Ohio,” 22–35; “Work Book Study of Alternatives,” 5–13.

⁵⁷ “Work Book Study of Alternatives,” iii, 24–27. Though the study used the term “Wright-Dunbar Historic District,” the area is actually called the West Third Street Historic District.

⁵⁸ National Park Service, “Study of Alternatives: Dayton’s Aviation Heritage, Ohio,” iii–iv, 28–31.

Historical Park, which housed the Wright Flyer III. Under this alternative, a Black Pilots Museum and the International Women's Air and Space Museum "would be encouraged through financial subsidy and technical assistance to relocate in West Dayton." This third alternative would attempt to concentrate the history of aviation in the Innerwest neighborhood. This plan excluded the Wrights' personal lives.⁵⁹

The alternatives' suggested impacts revealed the economic underpinnings of the idea of a national park unit. In order to recreate the environment in which the Wrights and Dunbar lived, the first alternative called for rehabilitating "the entire two-block-long area of historic Third Street." The goal was to "eliminate the vacant, unused appearance of the neighborhood." Though complete refurbishment of all buildings was out of reach, the plan did call for at least the exteriors to match the period of significance and new buildings to match the "historic scale, context, and façade." Under this first alternative, the federal government, in partnership with local and state entities, would revitalize a rundown yet historically important neighborhood. The authors clearly anticipated drastic economic changes to accompany this plan. The outlined impacts included "additional demand on city services" as well as a fear that "a perception could arise that a large amount of money might be spent to develop a tourist attraction that would not benefit the immediate neighborhood." Park planners anticipated opposition regarding the plan to rebuild the neighborhood. The second and third alternatives also considered the economic impact. The authors suggested the second plan "would assist in the economic revitalization of the area" but implied the benefits might not outweigh the "additional demands on city services." The third alternative would build attractions throughout Dayton and would therefore provide "increasing tourist expenditures and tax-generating activity."⁶⁰

Dunbar appeared more frequently in the final version of the study than in the workshop version. The first alternative targeted his home and its surrounding area for rehabilitation, as his home and the Dunbar Historic District were an integral part of creating the neighborhood environment and establishing the historic context in which the Wrights lived. This alternative justified Dunbar's inclusion through his friendships with the Wrights, arguing that it was "a key element in the personal life of the Wrights." In the second alternative, Dunbar's house would "depict life in turn-of-the-century Ohio" in addition to explaining his friendship with the brothers. Though included, the location of Dunbar's house would require transportation to link it to the other sites. Unlike the first alternative, a pedestrian path was not proposed. The final alternative, however, excluded Dunbar entirely.⁶¹

⁵⁹ National Park Service, iv, 32–35.

⁶⁰ National Park Service, 24, 27, 35.

⁶¹ National Park Service, 24–25, 28–31, 35, quotation 31.

In a summary of the larger report, the NPS outlined “future actions for the preservation, development, and interpretation of aviation-related resources of national, state, and local significance.” Though it did not recommend a preferred alternative or management structure, it described various possibilities. Notably, the report concluded that of the sites examined, only the Wright Cycle Company building met “the criteria for designation as a unit of the park system” in its present state. While the other sites, including the Wright Flyer III and Huffman Prairie Flying Field, had secure financial backing, ATI’s ability to fund the Cycle Company was “tenuous at best.” The NPS would provide the necessary funding.⁶²

The Study of Alternatives offered seven proposed management styles. The first continued with the 2003 Fund Committee as the coordinating body. The NPS would assist but would not create a national park. The second option provided both the 2003 Fund Committee and the NPS with oversight, but still did not create a national park unit. Rather, the NPS would be more involved without taking full ownership. Under the third option, a state commission, created through state legislation, would oversee the aviation sites. The fourth option designated the NHLs an affiliated area of the National Park System. The federal government would again help with technical assistance, building visitor centers, and interpreting sites, but ownership would remain unchanged. A fifth management option designated the sites as a national reserve, meaning that NPS could purchase buildings “within the most critical areas.” Otherwise, the management would be a collaboration of federal, state, and local governments. The sixth option created a federal commission. This option created a national park based around the Wright Cycle Company building, with a commission composed of “different levels of government and the private sector.” The final option created a national historic site, composed of only the Hoover Block and the Wright Cycle Company building. NPS would manage the sites.⁶³

There were drawbacks to each of these options. Some current owners of the sites, such as Carillon Historical Park and the Ohio Historical Society, were unwilling to cede ownership.⁶⁴ As recounted by Madeline Iseli, “it was a constant struggle to explain why do we have an African American poet here in this aviation park.”⁶⁵ Even members of ATI hesitated to transfer the Wright Cycle Company building and the Hoover Block to the NPS, those sites having played such an important role in ATI’s early identity.⁶⁶ Each option also necessitated generous private support. Those options with NPS management or a federal commission assumed “the private sector would be . . . the major contributor of funds.”⁶⁷

⁶² National Park Service and 2003 Fund Committee, “Summary Draft Study of Alternatives,” January 1991, 1–3, National Park Service Electronic Technical Information Center, <https://pubs.nps.gov>.

⁶³ National Park Service, “Study of Alternatives: Dayton’s Aviation Heritage, Ohio,” 36–39.

⁶⁴ National Park Service, 40–41.

⁶⁵ Oral History of Madeline Iseli, 5.

⁶⁶ Tillson, Oral History, 19.

⁶⁷ National Park Service, “Study of Alternatives: Dayton’s Aviation Heritage, Ohio,” 39.

The 2003 Fund Committee did not seriously consider creating a state park. In their view, even the state and the state historical society lacked the funds and expertise to adequately address the Wright brothers' and Dunbar's legacies. Committee members were not interested in management options that did not include the federal government in some way. "The National Park Service was the answer—the fantasy answer or the ultimate answer" to saving the significant sites of West Dayton.⁶⁸

Conclusion

What began in 1980 as an economic development tool for one struggling Rustbelt city expanded in little more than a decade to a vision for a national historical park that had captured the attention of both the National Park Service and Congress. Aviation Trail, Inc. wanted the world to know about Dayton's critical role in the history of aviation. The group located, documented, and preserved key sites related to the Wright brothers and began a marketing effort to raise the profile of Dayton's aviation heritage. Some aviation enthusiasts expanded their historic preservation goals to include the West Dayton neighborhood where the Wrights had come of age; they saw the importance of linking the Wright story to the life of poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, and they realized their vision required expertise they did not have. This group of advocates named themselves the 2003 Fund Committee, and in 1989 reached out to their representatives in Congress and to the National Park Service with the idea that their city's story was nationally significant.

By 1991, the 2003 Fund Committee had grown in size and influence. It had successfully drawn NPS attention to Dayton-area aviation sites, leading to National Historic Landmark status for four Wright sites. It had persuaded the city to at least consider the preservation of the Wrights' old neighborhood in the interests of a potential national park unit. In 1991, the committee received \$200,000 from Montgomery County to pursue its national park plans. That same year, the committee hired Representative Hall's former district director, Madeline Iseli, as executive director. She was the first full-time staff member and established her office in the Wright Cycle Company building.⁶⁹ With the study of alternatives completed and a full-time staff member, the group was prepared to actually lobby for the park. This effort is the subject of the next chapter.

⁶⁸ Sharkey, Oral History II, 53–55, quotation 55. The park subcommittee did list achieving state designation as a historic park and the creation of a state commission as goals, after the park had been created. The Wright-Dunbar State Heritage Commission was created in 1993. "Sub-Committee Meeting Minutes, March 20, 1990," 5; "Dayton Aviation Heritage Park Task Force Mission Statement," n.d., folder 1, box 1, Bill Gibson Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage Park Library; "2003 Forms Dayton Aviation Park Committee" (The 2003 Times, March 30, 1994), folder 1, box 1, Bill Gibson Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage Park Library.

⁶⁹ "County Backs Downtown, Good Aviation Projects," *Dayton Daily News*, October 26, 1991.

CHAPTER FOUR

Becoming a National Historical Park

In the 1980s, Daytonians began to see their aviation history in a new light. A group of local advocates sought to use Dayton's ties to the origins of the aviation industry to improve their city's poor economic conditions. The group hoped that aviation history could help revitalize the city, especially West Dayton, where the Wright brothers and poet Paul Laurence Dunbar had lived. City boosters first established Aviation Trail, Inc. in 1981 to raise public awareness of aviation sites in the area and to preserve two remaining Wright buildings in West Dayton. Later, in 1989, another group formed and called itself the 2003 Fund Committee. The latter group set its sights on a national park, viewing the National Park Service (NPS) as the best organization to protect and interpret Dayton's aviation history. The beginnings of both these groups and the initial reconnaissance of the NPS are detailed in the previous chapter.¹

Ultimately, the Dayton advocates succeeded. Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park (NHP) was signed into law in 1992. Several noncontiguous sites composed the newly created park. The core parcel, located in West Dayton, included one of the Wright brothers' bicycle shops and the Hoover Block, the location of one of the Wright brothers' print shops. It was at the Hoover Block location that the Wrights printed Paul Laurence Dunbar's newspaper, the *Dayton Tattler*. The other national historical park sites included Huffman Prairie Flying Field, the location of the Wrights' first sustained, practical flight and now a part of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, and the 1905 Wright Flyer III, the first practical airplane, at Carillon Historical Park. The final site was the home of Paul Laurence Dunbar, located in West Dayton near the core parcel. Of these sites, the cycle shop, Huffman Prairie, and the Wright Flyer III were designated National Historic Landmarks (NHLs) in 1990, as part of the initial NPS investigation into the resources in Dayton. The Dunbar House was also an NHL, having received this designation in 1962.²

¹ "Gerald Shea Sharkey Obituary," *Dayton Daily News*, April 8, 2014, <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/dayton/name/gerald-sharkey-obituary?pid=170539692>.

² Jill O'Bright, David G. Richardson, and William S. Harlow, "Wright Cycle Company and Wright and Wright Printing," National Historic Landmark Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1990), <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/71986526>; Jill O'Bright, David G. Richardson, and William S. Harlow, "Huffman Prairie Flying Field," National Historic Landmark Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1990), <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/71986479>; Jill O'Bright, David G. Richardson, and William S. Harlow, "Wright Flyer III," National Historic Landmark Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1990); Joseph S. Mendinghall, "Paul Laurence Dunbar House, Dayton, OH," National Register of Historic Places Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1977).

The process of establishing the national historical park, however, heightened fault lines within the larger Dayton community. The group’s decision to include Dunbar in the park boundaries was both a strategic move to encourage the predominantly African American West Dayton community to support the measure and an attempt to acknowledge the diverse community that produced the Wright brothers. Nevertheless, the park’s proponents, in their attempt to explain Dunbar’s inclusion, glossed over racial discrimination at the turn of the twentieth century. Instead, they exaggerated the relationship between Dunbar and the Wrights as an idealized example of racial harmony for late-twentieth-century Americans to emulate. While they succeeded in securing Dunbar’s position in the park, subsequent efforts demonstrated that Dunbar remained a secondary character to the park’s larger theme of aviation. In short, the park’s backers had the admirable goal of establishing a national park unit highlighting the achievements of both the Wright brothers and Dunbar. Unfortunately, the final result fell short of that goal.

This chapter analyzes community outreach efforts made by park advocates and the ensuing community response. From there, it summarizes legislative efforts from the park’s authorization through subsequent legislative amendments.

The Public Response

The 2003 Fund Committee recognized early on that it would need community support in order to build a national park. The proposed plan covered large swaths of Dayton and intersected with various communities with different needs—not to mention two congressional districts and three municipalities. Ultimately, this dispersed geography may have contributed to Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP’s resiliency and stability. One of the congressional districts included West Dayton and was traditionally Democrat; the other encompassed Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and was traditionally Republican. The result led to the ongoing possibility of bipartisan support for the park’s interests. In the early planning stages, however, the park’s dispersed geography brought with it logistical challenges and differing agendas.³

Park advocates and NPS professionals involved the public and various organizations during the Study of Alternatives, an NPS process designed to consider the full range of scenarios for managing cultural resources being considered for NPS designation. In February 1990, 150 people, including Representative Tony Hall and a staffer from Senator Howard Metzenbaum’s office, attended a community meeting in Dayton to discuss plans for a national park. While the congressional delegates spoke in favor of the idea, some participants “expressed general concern about possible future impact on the West Dayton

³ William Harlow, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

community.”⁴ That same month, the team composed a newsletter with pertinent information to be distributed to community members, requesting “local input.” In March 1990, the team met with West Dayton residents at the Wright Cycle Company building on South Williams Street. Like the congressional delegates at the previous meeting, most but not all “local residents expressed interest and general support for the study.”⁵ The Study of Alternatives workshop in May 1990 solicited input from the 2003 Fund Committee members and other site owners. The NPS presented another version of the study to the 2003 Fund Committee in December 1990, and the committee held two public sessions early in 1991 to solicit public comment regarding proposed alternatives for the park. The team published the final version of the study in April 1991.⁶

Dayton residents had a clear preference for alternative one, which would situate the Wright brothers as products of Dayton’s unique environment and included plans to restore the neighborhood. Of the twenty-one public comment forms the team received, twelve expressed a preference for the first option. At the public meetings, residents said they preferred alternative one “because it addresses development of the West Dayton area, consolidates Wright Brothers’ related aviation attractions, and most strongly connects to Paul Laurence Dunbar.” The community wanted to emphasize Dunbar’s connection to the Wright brothers. Residents cited “the weak link with Paul Laurence Dunbar” as the reason they did not care for alternatives two or three. However, the study team did note that they received “an additional 108 comment forms, many with similar wording” following the close of the comment period. These later forms were not enthusiastic about the inclusion of Dunbar “in the study for a park commemorating Dayton’s aviation heritage.” The use of similar wording suggests there was an organized effort to oppose Dunbar’s inclusion. The reasons later commenters opposed Dunbar’s inclusion in the park are unclear.⁷

Despite earlier resistance, by 1990, the Dayton city government had come around to the idea of preserving the neighborhood. Perhaps in acknowledgment of the positive public response to the ideas presented by the NPS and the 2003 Fund Committee, the city became “actively committed to supporting projects related to the history of aviation in

⁴ National Park Service, “Study of Alternatives: Dayton’s Aviation Heritage, Ohio” (Omaha: US Department of the Interior, 1991), 44, National Park Service Electronic Technical Information Center, <https://pubs.nps.gov>, https://pubs.nps.gov/eTIC/COLO-DEVA/DAAV_362_D2_0001_of_0070.pdf.

⁵ National Park Service, 44.

⁶ National Park Service, 44; Tom Gaffney, “Park Service Draft Report Outlines Alternatives for Recognizing Wrights,” *Dayton Daily News*, December 22, 1990; Ronald W. Johnson, “Task Directive Dayton’s Aviation Heritage: A Study of Alternatives, Ohio Package No. MWRO DS33 15,” May 1990, 1, folder: Wright Brothers 2, MWR [Midwest Regional] Park Creation Records, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; “Park Service Has Ideas—Where’s Dayton Going?,” *Dayton Daily News*, January 23, 1991; National Park Service and 2003 Fund Committee, “Summary Draft Study of Alternatives,” January 1991, 1, National Park Service Electronic Technical Information Center, <https://pubs.nps.gov/>; “Work Book Study of Alternatives: Dayton’s Aviation Heritage,” May 15, 1990, National Park Service Electronic Technical Information Center, <https://pubs.nps.gov>.

⁷ National Park Service, “Study of Alternatives: Dayton’s Aviation Heritage, Ohio,” 44–45.

Dayton.”⁸ In conjunction with the 2003 Fund Committee, city officials worked to improve West Dayton and explore options for tourist transportation. Specifically, the city commissioners voted to fund an engineering study of six historic buildings on Williams Street, near the Wright Cycle Company, and committed money to repair the façades of several buildings in the area. Regarding the proposed national park unit, the city “indicated a willingness to accept responsibility” for planning and operating a pedestrian link in West Dayton, as well as a tentative interest in rebuilding key sites in the West Third Street Historic District. The city also expressed its support for building a visitor center in West Dayton.⁹

Committee members pushed for economic development in West Dayton. For example, Gerald “Jerry” Sharkey, one of the cofounders of both Aviation Trail, Inc. and the 2003 Fund Committee, argued that the park would fail without revitalizing the neighborhood. Regardless of the renovations and investments made to the Dunbar House, the Wright Cycle Company, and the Hoover Block, “if that neighborhood did not improve, if the crime was not reduced, if some of the buildings did not reopen, if whatever, it simply would not have been a viable park.”¹⁰ The park depended on urban revitalization, even if it was not intended solely to facilitate it. Likewise, 2003 Fund Committee member (and publisher of the *Dayton Daily News*) Brad Tillson used the potential economic benefits to entice investors, soliciting contributions by arguing “that there would be economic development value, that there would be marketing value to the community, and there would be left behind legacies that would have a lasting value.” He persuaded investors that their money would rehabilitate the area. Rather than focusing solely on preserving the Wrights’ or Dunbar’s legacies, Tillson emphasized donors’ legacies.¹¹ His arguments returned to the roots of the Aviation Trail: to bring economic development to Dayton.

⁸ National Park Service, 40.

⁹ Mizell Stewart III, “Officials Hopeful on Park Site, Wright-Dunbar Blocks Are Focus,” *Dayton Daily News*, March 14, 1990; National Park Service, “Study of Alternatives: Dayton’s Aviation Heritage, Ohio,” 40–42, quotation 42.

¹⁰ Jerry Sharkey, Oral History II, interview by Ann Deines, February 23, 1996, 57, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

¹¹ Brad Tillson, Oral History, interview by Ed Roach, September 20, 2005, 8.



Jerry Sharkey being interviewed by NBC News, 1988. Image: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

In West Dayton, the committee purposefully emphasized the importance of Dunbar to the park. While Tillson acknowledged “a legitimate historical connection” between the Wright brothers and Dunbar, he admitted the committee also hoped to entice West Dayton residents to support the national park plan. The committee was “very much aware that the core of this park was going to be in a predominately minority area” and residents’ support was crucial for success.¹² Similarly, Sharkey recounted “part of it was the friendship between the Wrights and Dunbar, which was real and significant, part of it was that we were operating in a black area, a predominately white group in a black area, and we needed minority support, which we wanted.” Sharkey recognized that “it seemed. . . to be offensive” to preserve the Wrights’ publishing business without acknowledging Dunbar.¹³ By including the Dunbar House in the proposed national park, the committee hoped to garner support in the West Dayton community.

Including Dunbar made the park more attractive to the NPS as well. The members of the 2003 Fund Committee understood that African American history was not as well documented or preserved as European American history in the National Park System. According to Tillson, the inclusion of Dunbar “would be an opportunity” for the NPS “to

¹² Brad Tillson, Oral History, interview by Ann Deines, February 29, 1996, 7.

¹³ Sharkey, Oral History II, 50–51.

interpret an African American asset.”¹⁴ It would be a “two-for-one’ deal,” demonstrating Dunbar’s achievements and “the urban African-American experience at the turn-of-the-century, an experience that is told nowhere else in the Park Service system.”¹⁵ In addition, as NPS Director of the Midwest Region Don Castleberry argued, the supposed Wright-Dunbar friendship would “serve well in communities such as Dayton as an example of successful everyday relationships between the races.”¹⁶ The inclusion of Dunbar would provide an example for the Dayton community, diversify the stories told by the NPS, and ensure West Dayton community support.

The 2003 Fund Committee seemed genuine in their belief in the importance of the relationship between Dunbar and the Wrights, particularly Orville. In a memo prepared in support of the Senate bill to create a national historical park in Dayton, the committee outlined the evidence of a Dunbar-Wright friendship, citing only secondary scholarship. They claimed Dunbar had a long friendship with the Wrights, that his mother was their washerwoman, and that he witnessed the expansion of their printing business. The committee further claimed that Orville facilitated Dunbar’s contact with the publisher of his first book.¹⁷ These more-detailed connections are absent from legislative testimony, appearing only in submitted answers to specific questions. Instead, during testimony, proponents of the park focused on the facts that Orville Wright and Dunbar attended high school together and that the brothers had printed Dunbar’s newspaper, the *Dayton Tattler*.¹⁸

Little evidence exists to support the relationship between Dunbar and the Wrights as described by the committee. The group cited biographies of Dunbar without acknowledging the limitations of these sources. If biographers included a bibliography at all, they did not include specific evidence regarding the Wright brothers. For example, Virginia Cunningham, on the dedication page of her biography *Paul Laurence Dunbar and His Song*, mentioned Orville among others who “graciously searched their memories,” suggesting that Orville provided his own personal account of their relationship. It is unclear from her text or bibliography which memories Orville provided. Since the book was published forty years after Dunbar’s death, shortly before Orville’s own life ended, Orville’s

¹⁴ Tillson, Oral History, February 29, 1996, 8.

¹⁵ 2003 Fund Committee, “Reasons to Include the Paul Laurence Dunbar House State Memorial in the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park,” May 19, 1992, 1–2, folder 4, box 343, Senate Papers, John H. Glenn Archives, Ohio State University.

¹⁶ Don Castleberry to Dale Bumpers, “Letter to Dale Bumpers,” March 16, 1992, folder “Wright Brothers 1,” MWR [Midwest Regional] Park Creation Files, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

¹⁷ 2003 Fund Committee, “Reasons to Include the Paul Laurence Dunbar House State Memorial in the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.”

¹⁸ 2003 Fund Committee, 1–2; Marvin Wilks McFarland, ed., *The Papers of Wilbur and Orville Wright: Including the Chanute-Wright Letters and Other Papers of Octave Chanute*, vol. 2 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953); Castleberry to Bumpers, “Letter to Dale Bumpers,” March 16, 1992.

recollections should not have been taken at face value.¹⁹ Another source the committee referenced, Jean Gould's *The Dunbar Boy*, clearly had relied on Cunningham's text, describing identical interactions between Orville and Dunbar. Her work did not have a bibliography.²⁰ The only known instance of Orville personally describing his relationship with Dunbar is a letter from 1934, almost thirty years after Dunbar's death, in which Orville wrote that he and Dunbar were "close friends" in school and that they briefly collaborated on a paper, presumably the *Dayton Tattler*. Orville wrote the letter to Edward Johnson, whom he described as a "colored boy," which could have shaped his recollections. Orville, who died in his seventies, had an opportunity to shape his legacy; Dunbar, who died at age thirty-three, did not.²¹

Relying on such thin evidence underscored the committee's belief that the success of the park depended on Dunbar. 2003 Fund Committee member Walter Rice even admitted later that the friendship was "a very loose connection" and "somewhat more attenuated than we would like to admit."²² The committee's insistence on a meaningful relationship between the three men served to legitimize Dunbar's inclusion in the park, while obscuring the practical and political reasons for including the poet, such as garnering community support. This version of the past also implied a racial harmony that glossed over the oppressive and often deadly realities of racial segregation at the turn of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, the 2003 Fund Committee was ultimately successful in persuading the larger community. In November 1990, the Ohio Senate passed a resolution in support of the park, indicating that the idea had gained traction outside of the immediate vicinity of Dayton.²³ The US Air Force also agreed to cooperate, as did Representative Hall and Senator Metzenbaum. The Dayton community was interested in bringing a national park unit to the area; the only true obstacle was resistance from the residents of Oakwood.

¹⁹ Virginia Cunningham, *Paul Laurence Dunbar and His Song: Illustrated with Photos*, reprint of 1947 ed. (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1969), v, 42–45, 113.

²⁰ Jean Gould, *That Dunbar Boy: The Story of America's Famous Negro Poet* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1958), 88, 93, 166–67.

²¹ McFarland, *The Papers of Wilbur and Orville Wright*, 2:1162; 2003 Fund Committee, "Reasons to Include the Paul Laurence Dunbar House State Memorial in the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park," 1–2; this last point was made by architectural historian William Harlow. See Harlow, Comments on Draft 1 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History; transmitted to Edward Roach, July 10, 2020.

²² Walter Rice, Oral History, interview by Ann Deines, March 6, 1996, 5.

²³ Kurt L. Leib, "Park for Wrights Backed—Ohio Senate Calls for Creating National Site," *Dayton Daily News*, November 19, 1990.

Opposition in Oakwood and West Dayton

The proposed park initially included Hawthorn Hill, Orville Wright's "success mansion" completed in 1914 and located in the Dayton suburb of Oakwood. In 1991, the house was owned by the National Cash Register company (NCR) and used for conferences and visiting guests. It seemed like a logical addition to a national park unit honoring the Wright brothers. The house remained structurally the same as when Orville had lived there, and Orville's library had been preserved. NCR "strongly support[ed] NHL status for Hawthorn Hill" and "would be willing to cooperate" with further efforts to both research and preserve the property. The company was even amenable to "opening the home for limited tours once or twice a year."²⁴ The surrounding Oakwood community, however, rejected the idea.

Oakwood in the 1990s retained its status as a wealthy suburb, as it had been when the Wright family moved there in the 1910s, and the residents of Oakwood had little interest in Hawthorn Hill becoming part of a national historical park. Though they understood the historical significance of the home and welcomed its National Historic Landmark designation, they feared that making it a tourist stop would interrupt their daily lives. As Oakwood Vice Mayor Mary Pryor described to the local newspaper, with a national park, the "traffic and noise will just be horrendous." Oakwood residents organized to protest the proposal. Martin Schear drafted a petition objecting to adding the home to a national historical park, obtained twenty-seven signatures, and submitted it to the Oakwood City Council. City Manager J. D. Foell wrote to Representative Hall in opposition and included a copy of the petition.²⁵

Oakwood residents attended one of the NPS public meetings, which became heated. As described by the *Dayton Daily News*, Oakwood residents sparred over plans for Hawthorn Hill. One Oakwood resident called her neighbors "selfish" for not supporting the national park plan. She added that "Oakwood couldn't shut itself off from the world or build a dome over the town." Other Oakwood residents replied, "Yes we can!"²⁶ The community organized to insist on maintaining the current arrangement. Proponents of the national park fired back against Oakwood's rejection of the plan. The newspaper quoted Sharkey, himself a resident of Oakwood, describing the petition as "elitist, short-sighted, and petty."²⁷ The *Dayton Daily News* condemned Oakwood's response in an editorial.²⁸ While the 2003 Fund Committee and other supporters of the national park plan clearly resented Oakwood's response, they came to accept it. Or, as critics summarized, they "rolled

²⁴ National Park Service, "Study of Alternatives: Dayton's Aviation Heritage, Ohio," 41.

²⁵ Jim Dillon, "Oakwood Residents Decry Park Plan," *Dayton Daily News*, September 18, 1991.

²⁶ Ellen Belcher, "Oakwood Wears Its Arrogance Proudly," *Dayton Daily News*, November 7, 1991.

²⁷ Benjamin Kline and Tom Price, "Park Plan Won't Disturb Oakwood Hall Says," *Dayton Daily News*, September 19, 1991.

²⁸ "Oakwood Can't See Past Its Own Small Concerns," *Dayton Daily News*, November 4, 1991. 2003 Fund Committee member Brad Tillson was publisher of this newspaper at the time.

over” and “licked the critics’ Dock Siders.”²⁹ Two months after the meeting, the 2003 Fund Committee asked that the home be removed from the bill. In testimony before a Senate subcommittee, 2003 Fund Committee member Rice explained, “After discussions with Hawthorne [*sic*] Hill’s neighbors, we believe that it is in the best interests of all concerned to remove Hawthorne [*sic*] Hill.”³⁰ The final version of the bill did not include the home.

The reaction of Oakwood residents and the 2003 Fund Committee’s subsequent response differed strikingly from engagement with the predominantly African American community in West Dayton. Like Oakwood, some residents of West Dayton were hesitant to embrace a national park unit in their neighborhood and attended the community meetings to raise their concerns. They questioned the motives of a mostly European American group proposing federal involvement in their neighborhood. At a March 1990 community meeting, one West Dayton resident said, “You guys are white and most politicians are white, and you guys really know how to manipulate people.” He continued, “If you really want to help us, then you would help us upgrade our properties and get them on the historical register.”³¹ As Tillson recounted in the newspaper, these residents were “full of rage.” Their concerns focused on economic issues and “the unwillingness of community institutions to invest in West Dayton.” They doubted that the addition of a national park unit would benefit their community at all.³²

Unlike the residents of Oakwood, West Dayton residents’ concerns did not result in changes to the planned park. Instead, park proponents argued that any changes to the neighborhood would benefit the community in the long run. Sharkey admitted that “unintentional’ changes could happen, including the economic displacement of some long-time residents,” but that “a lot of good things” could eventually come as well.³³ Similarly, Tillson argued that the national park would “bring new resources—financial, political, human” to improve the community.³⁴ In the ultimate dismissal of West Dayton residents’ concerns, Rice testified before the House of Representatives, “We have heard, I think I can say this, no negative comment from the community in the 27 months since our organization was formed.”³⁵ Despite concerns raised in West Dayton, the proposed park remained in the neighborhood.

²⁹ Belcher, “Oakwood Wears Its Arrogance Proudly.”

³⁰ Tom Beyerlein, “Wright Home Ruled Out of National Park Plan,” *Dayton Daily News*, November 1, 1991; United States Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and National Parks, *Miscellaneous National Park and National Trails Measures: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks and Forests of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, United States Senate, 102nd Cong., 2d. Sess.* (US Government Printing Office, 1992), 136.

³¹ Jim Dillon, “Wright Landmarks Could Change Neighborhood,” *Dayton Daily News*, March 28, 1990.

³² Brad Tillson, “It’s Time to Get Angry about Inner City Problems,” *Dayton Daily News*, May 5, 1991.

³³ Dillon, “Wright Landmarks Could Change Neighborhood.”

³⁴ Tillson, “It’s Time to Get Angry about Inner City Problems.”

³⁵ House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, *Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Preservation Act of 1991: Hearings on H.R.2321, 102nd Cong., 1st Sess.* (Washington: US Government Publishing Office, 1992), 101.

Columnist Ellen Belcher remarked on the differing responses in an editorial. She contrasted West Dayton's concerns about "drug dealers and prostitutes" with Oakwood's concern over tour buses. The predominantly European American suburb opposed the park "because they fear the park service bringing busloads of tourists into their neighborhood." Whereas the 2003 Fund Committee had acknowledged West Dayton's concerns but ultimately disregarded them, the committee had acquiesced to Oakwood's demands. Before pulling Hawthorn Hill from the legislation, the committee promised the Oakwood City Council they could veto any event hosted at the home with over thirty guests. The council demanded approval over events with twenty or more people. Belcher summed up her piece by asking, "Who do these Oakwood people think they are?"³⁶ Oakwood residents worried about noise and traffic, while the West Dayton community residents watched their houses and neighborhood crumble around them.

The 2003 Fund Committee's capitulation to the citizens of Oakwood and the removal of Hawthorn Hill from the park represents another way in which the city government and larger community ignored the citizens of West Dayton. The 2003 Fund Committee took efforts to garner community buy-in from West Dayton residents, but their vision for the national park unit, and therefore West Dayton, continued unabated, regardless of the community's concerns. As stated in testimony before the US House of Representatives, West Dayton residents were even expected to "fix up their homes" in order to "maintain their part of the partnership."³⁷ In contrast, a petition signed by a mere twenty-seven people from the predominately European American community of Oakwood prevented the inclusion of the Wrights' actual home. The wishes of the small white community influenced the boundaries of the national park, securing the exclusion of a relevant piece of Wright history, while the black community's concerns were ignored in favor of building a national park.

Authorizing a National Park

Confident in their community support, the 2003 Fund Committee looked to Congress to make the national historical park a reality. In 1991, Sharkey took the lead on crafting the legislation, using a "cut and paste of the Lowell legislation,"³⁸ then making revisions to "make it appropriate for the Dayton area."³⁹ Hall's aide, Michael Gessel, also worked

³⁶ Belcher, "Oakwood Wears Its Arrogance Proudly."

³⁷ House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, *Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Preservation Act of 1991: Hearing before the Subcommittee*, 99.

³⁸ William Gibson to ATTN: Legislative Affairs Specialist Regional Director, Midwest Region, "Memorandum: Comments on S.1064, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP," June 6, 1991, folder "Wright Brothers 1," MWR [Midwest Regional] Park Creation Files, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

³⁹ Sharkey, *Oral History II*, 59.

extensively on the proposal.⁴⁰ In the words of his former colleague, Madeline Iseli, “Michael Gessel was clearly the driving force in terms of the nitty-gritty details. . . ; in terms of the legislation process we really looked to Michael to guide us.”⁴¹

In May 1991, Representative Hall held a press conference to announce the legislation for the park. This event was held at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC, in front of “virtually an Ohio aviation annex to the museum,” a reference to Ohio’s extensive contribution to aviation and space exploration. Though the park honored both the Wright brothers and Dunbar, the location for its announcement, the air and space museum, underscored the park’s focus on aviation. In addition to Hall, whose district included the Wright Cycle Company building and the Hoover Block, both Senators John Glenn (a former astronaut) and Metzenbaum attended, as well as Representatives Dave Hobson, whose district included Huffman Prairie, and Bob McEwen (R-OH-6). Members of the 2003 Fund Committee, including Tillson, Rice, and Wilkinson “Wick” Wright, flew in for the event.⁴² Glenn framed the park as a truly American story of hard work. The park “underscores what has always been great about this nation: that two Americans with an idea through perserverance [*sic*] and hard work can not only achieve their dreams, but change the face of our world in the process.” Glenn did not mention Dunbar. Of the speakers, only State Representative Rhine McLin, an African American woman, spoke of the poet.⁴³

Tony Hall introduced H.R. 2321, the Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Act, in 1991. Both Ohio Senators, John Glenn and Howard Metzenbaum, introduced the Senate version of the bill, S.1064, on May 14, 1991.⁴⁴ While Hall had been immediately receptive to the idea of the park, Glenn was not. According to Sharkey, Glenn was uninterested until a reporter, Tom Price, wrote a “scathing column” criticizing Glenn for not caring about the bill. The article “really got Glenn’s attention,” and he began working to pass the legislation. As Sharkey described it, Glenn was the “aviation guy. He’s been our astronaut, he’s a pilot, he’s a World War II ace. . . if he couldn’t understand it and didn’t understand it and didn’t understand the significance of it, we couldn’t persuade anybody.”⁴⁵ It was important for Glenn to support the bill.

⁴⁰ Gibson to Regional Director, Midwest Region, “Memorandum: Comments on S.1064, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP,” June 6, 1991, 11–48; Sharkey, Oral History II, 59; Benjamin Kline, “Aviation Park Plan Meets Delay,” *Dayton Daily News*, March 8, 1991.

⁴¹ Oral History of Madeline Iseli, interview by Ed Roach, September 9, 2005, 4, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁴² Brad Tillson, “Capital Trip Highlights Dayton’s Aviation History,” *Dayton Daily News*, May 19, 1991.

⁴³ John Glenn, “Statement of Senator John Glenn: Aviation Heritage National Park,” May 14, 1991, folder 4, box 343, Senate Papers, John H. Glenn Archives, Ohio State University; “Agenda for Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Park Press Conference,” May 14, 1991, John H. Glenn Archives, Ohio State University.

⁴⁴ “United States Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Business Meeting Agenda,” September 22, 1992, 19, folder 4, box 343, Senate Papers, John H. Glenn Archives, Ohio State University.

⁴⁵ Sharkey, Oral History II, 69.

Of the sites the NPS targeted for the park, five areas appeared in the initial bill. The NPS would acquire the Wright Cycle Company and the Hoover Block as part of the “core parcel.” Also included in the core were the “Daniel Fitch house, Ed Sines house, Wright family house site, and Orville’s laboratory site.” The four other sites in the legislation included Huffman Prairie Flying Field and Wright Brothers Hill, both of which are on the grounds of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, the Wright Flyer III at Carillon Historical Park, the Wrights’ home Hawthorn Hill, and the Paul Laurence Dunbar House. The final bill reduced the core to only the Wright Cycle Company and the Hoover Block buildings and removed Wright Brothers Hill and Hawthorn Hill from the park. The bill specified that the NPS would own the Wright Cycle Company and the Hoover Block, but the other sites would be operated through cooperative agreements. The Paul Laurence Dunbar House, for example, would continue to be owned by the state of Ohio and operated by the Ohio Historical Society.⁴⁶

To navigate the series of partnerships that would operate the park, the bill created the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission. Until its sunset on January 1, 2004, the commission would oversee the administration of “properties, sites, and artifacts not owned by the National Park Service or the State of Ohio which are within or outside the park or preservation district,” but associated with the Wright brothers or Dunbar. The US Secretary of the Interior would appoint commissioners, at the recommendation of the governor of Ohio, the city of Dayton, and other entities within Ohio.⁴⁷ Proponents of the park saw the commission as necessary to coordinate the various entities collaborating to oversee the park. As Rice explained, “without partnerships, the story cannot be told. Without the Commission, there can be no partnerships.”⁴⁸ The final version of the bill curbed the powers of the commission, limiting members from seventeen to thirteen. Federal funding was capped at \$350,000, “with a 50% non-federal matching requirement.” The commission was no longer authorized to operate or buy additional properties or offer loans.⁴⁹

The US House of Representatives held hearings on the bill in August 1991. The Senate did not hold a hearing until February 1992. At both hearings, members of Congress and NPS representatives raised several issues. They questioned the need for a park at all, the creation and structure of a commission to oversee the park, the economic ramifications

⁴⁶ Office of Senator John Glenn, “H.R.2321 Mark Up” (1991), folder 4, box 343, Senate Papers, John H. Glenn Archives, Ohio State University.

⁴⁷ Office of Senator John Glenn, 12.

⁴⁸ House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, *Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Preservation Act of 1991: Hearing before the Subcommittee*, 13–18, 80.

⁴⁹ Shannon Watson to Ron Grimes and Mary Jane Veno, “Information Memorandum: Side by Side Comparison of House and Senate Wright Park Bills,” March 6, 1992, folder 4, box 343, Senate Papers, John H. Glenn Archives, Ohio State University; “Public Law 102-419: To Establish the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park” (1992), <https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/102/419.pdf>. The commission could only buy property if given money expressly for the purpose of purchasing that property.

of creating the park, and the connection between the Wrights and Dunbar. The Ohio delegation and members of the 2003 Fund Committee worked on lobbying members of Congress for support of the bill.

Members of both the House and Senate objected to creating another national park unit focused on the Wright brothers. While not doubting the importance of Wilbur and Orville Wright, many felt the national memorial at Kill Devil Hills in North Carolina was sufficient. As Representative Bruce Vento (D-MN-4), chair of the House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, said, “Many Americans are aware of the Wright Brothers [*sic*] activities, but I think most often in history it is associated with Kitty Hawk.” Similarly, Senator Dale Bumpers (D-AR) asked Denis P. Galvin, NPS Associate Director for Planning and Development, “How redundant with Wright Brothers National Memorial in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina would Dayton Aviation Heritage National Park be?”⁵⁰

The creation of the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission (DAHC) also gave park opponents cause for concern. Although unusual, it was not untried. In acknowledgment that neither states nor the federal government could preserve sites on their own, the federal government had previously created federal commissions to oversee various configurations of national parks, such as Lowell National Historical Park and the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor.⁵¹ Despite the precedent, the NPS objected to the proposed commission. In their statements, Regional Director Don Castleberry and Galvin attributed the NPS’s objection to a “potentially unconstitutional management structure of the proposed area and the open-ended costs of such an arrangement for the Federal Government.” As written in the original bill, the DAHC could acquire properties for the park that the NPS would then be financially responsible for. The NPS did not want the extra liabilities of properties it was not directly involved in acquiring.⁵²

⁵⁰ House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, *Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Preservation Act of 1991: Hearing before the Subcommittee*, 1; States and Forests, *Miscellaneous National Park and National Trails Measures*, 149. Castleberry addressed a similar question. Madeline Iseli-Smith to Ron Grimes, “Fax Memorandum,” June 3, 1992, folder 4 box 343, Senate Papers, John H. Glenn Archives, Ohio State University.

⁵¹ National Park Service, “Study of Alternatives: Dayton’s Aviation Heritage, Ohio,” appendix F: Federal Commissions, 56.

⁵² House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, *Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Preservation Act of 1991: Hearing before the Subcommittee*, 45; States and Forests, *Miscellaneous National Park and National Trails Measures*, 120. Despite opposing the structure of the park during his testimony, Castleberry personally approved of the idea of the park. Benjamin Kline, “Trend Supports Heritage Park, Federal Exec Says,” *Dayton Daily News*, October 19, 1990.



NPS Director of the Midwest Region Don Castleberry in 2005.
Image: NPS Gallery.

More significantly, the NPS found the DAHC unnecessary and overly complicated. In his prepared statement, Castleberry noted the drive of local Dayton organizations to preserve the Wright-affiliated sites. These organizations “demonstrated both the desire as well as the ability to actively lead such a partnership. . . without the creation of a Federally authorized and funded commission and a Federally authorized historic preservation district.”⁵³ Castleberry did not doubt the need to preserve these sites, but felt existing organizations were suited to the task. Representative Vento made a similar argument.⁵⁴ By proving themselves capable of promoting these sites, Aviation Trail, Inc. (ATI), Carillon Historical Park, and the Ohio Historical Society undermined their own arguments for requiring NPS expertise.

⁵³ House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, *Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Preservation Act of 1991: Hearing before the Subcommittee*, 48, 56. Wright Cycle Company was the one exception. NPS would take control of the property as ATI lacked the funds to properly care for it.

⁵⁴ *House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands*, 44. Galvin made the same arguments in the Senate hearing. States and Forests, *Miscellaneous National Park and National Trails Measures*, 125–26.

In the Senate, detractors objected to the park on economic grounds. Frank Murkowski (R-AK) opposed creating an additional unit for the NPS to fund when it already had more maintenance than it could afford. He characterized the bill as “an urban renewal project disguised as a park” and stated that he did “not believe the Service should be in the business of urban renewal.” The socioeconomic status and demographics of West Dayton outweighed the historical significance of sites affiliated with the Wright brothers. Senator Malcolm Wallop (R-WY) shared this view, arguing the proposed park was merely another method of “urban redevelopment.” He said, “We keep using the park system for urban redevelopment. We use it for everything but what it is intended.” These Senators intuitively saw the economic development origins of the national park idea in Dayton. Wallop voted against the bill in committee.⁵⁵

Senators, in particular, continued to hesitate over the inclusion of Dunbar. In June 1992, Senator Bumpers stated that he was “still unclear of Dunbar’s part in the park” and preferred to “mark up the bill without Dunbar.”⁵⁶ Some of his follow-up questions for Galvin asked, “How tenuous is the Wright-Dunbar link? Was this a factor in your determination of unsuitability?”⁵⁷ For Bumpers especially, including Dunbar in an aviation-focused park made little sense.

Park supporters did their best to address detractors’ four major objections to the park. To address concerns about multiple national park units honoring the Wrights, the Ohio delegation focused on Dayton’s particular importance to aviation history. The bill emphasized Dayton as the true home of aviation and the aviation industry. Kitty Hawk might have been the site of the Wrights’ first flight, but the brothers perfected the “world’s first practical airplane” in Dayton. Advancements developed in Dayton led to practical applications of flight, including mass production of planes, crop-dusting planes, a modern parachute, radio navigation, aerial photography, and pressurized cabins. As stated in the bill, it was not merely the invention of the plane but the development of the entire industry in Dayton that had changed modern life.⁵⁸

Regarding the creation of the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission, supporters framed federal involvement as essential for both interpretive and funding purposes. Rice submitted a statement arguing that the commission was necessary to capture the full story of aviation, tell a cohesive narrative, and provide funding: “Without the National Park

⁵⁵ States and Forests, *Miscellaneous National Park and National Trails Measures*, 3; “Orville and Wilbur’s Park Sputters But May Still Fly,” *The Plain Dealer*, August 8, 1992, folder 4, box 343, Senate Papers, John H. Glenn Archives, Ohio State University.

⁵⁶ Shannon Watson to Ron Grimes, “Action Memorandum: Dayton Park Status Report,” March 17, 1992, folder 4, box 343, Senate Papers, John H. Glenn Archives, Ohio State University.

⁵⁷ States and Forests, *Miscellaneous National Park and National Trails Measures*, appendix I, 149. Castleberry addressed a similar question. Madeline Iseli-Smith to Ron Grimes, “Fax Memorandum, June 3, 1992,” June 3, 1992.

⁵⁸ House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, *Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Preservation Act of 1991: Hearing before the Subcommittee*, 2–3.

Service to serve as the connective tissue to relate each of these sites to one another, and to tell the story of powered flight without a Federal commission to oversee the preservation and restoration of the area, we would be left with a lack of. . .any meaningful context.”⁵⁹

Echoing Sharkey’s original argument for a national park, Rice purported that only the National Park Service could adequately tell the story. Rice argued, “There is, quite simply, no local or state organization equipped to tell the story with the quality of the National Park Service.” He elaborated that ATI had reached its limit for historic preservation and interpretation. It needed federal resources to restore and interpret the buildings.⁶⁰

Park supporters mostly avoided economic arguments in their testimony. While the Aviation Trail and the national historical park were initially conceived of as economic drivers and tourist attractions in the region, proponents focused on the significance of the Wright brothers to US history, not the changes the park could bring to West Dayton. Knowing that the NPS and the federal government were tight on funds and that many politicians opposed expanding federal projects on principle, proponents strategically tried to minimize the possible economic benefits of a national park. Dayton Mayor Richard Clay Dixon wrote to Vento, “More importantly, this legislation will demonstrate that future national park sites in urban neighborhoods need not be either urban forts or just steps to gentrification.” The park would celebrate aviation, not help Dayton’s economy recover.⁶¹ As an unsigned opinion piece argued, “The way to the National Park Service’s heart is through Dayton’s aviation history.”⁶²

In his testimony, Rice hinted that NPS involvement could improve the neighborhood. He warned that without the NPS overseeing the disparate sites, Dayton would “be left with a number of disconnected sites, a number of pieces of the story, and blighted [*sic*] and forgotten neighborhood.” He implied that NPS involvement would help revitalize the area.⁶³

Supporters clearly anticipated pushback to the inclusion of Dunbar. Strategically, they emphasized the lack of diversity in national park units, arguing that including Dunbar would help “increase ethnic diversity in the National Park System.” However, the bulk of their testimonies focused on Dunbar’s connection to Dayton and the Wright brothers. They situated Dunbar as representative of the significance of the entire neighborhood, glossing over the fact that the poet had only lived in the property commemorated as the Dunbar House for the last years of his life. As Hall explained, his “house is in the same historic West Dayton neighborhood of the Wright brothers.” Historian Tom Crouch reiterated that the neighborhood itself shaped the story. He emphasized preserving the

⁵⁹ States and Forests, *Miscellaneous National Park and National Trails Measures*, 136.

⁶⁰ States and Forests, 136–37, 150.

⁶¹ House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, *Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Preservation Act of 1991: Hearing before the Subcommittee*, 116.

⁶² “Park Service Has Ideas—Where’s Dayton Going?”

⁶³ States and Forests, *Miscellaneous National Park and National Trails Measures*, 137.

entire area surrounding the Wright and Dunbar resources in order to present visitors with “an opportunity to study and understand the workings of a turn of the century urban neighborhood, and to develop a far better sense of the way in which Wilbur and Orville Wright lived their lives.”⁶⁴

Proponents argued that Dunbar’s proximity to the Wrights contributed to the brothers’ success. Hall speculated that “the Wrights were inspired to their own achievement by their friend, who became an international celebrity while they were still toiling in their bicycle shop.” Mayor Dixon shared this sentiment. Writing to Vento, he said, “Are we so certain that planes would fly and poems would rhyme, in just the way they did, if it were not for the friendship of the creators?” Metzenbaum argued that both Dunbar and the Wrights illustrated “the creative genius of the human spirit” in Dayton at the turn of the twentieth century. Rice continued this theme, describing Dunbar and the Wrights as “collaborators.”⁶⁵ Including Dunbar highlighted that the Wrights were a uniquely Dayton story. The city itself, the West Dayton neighborhood, and the people who lived there fostered the environment that led to the Wright brothers’ creation. Incorporating Dunbar into the park underscored the interpretive framework the advocates wanted to achieve.

Including Dunbar promoted the narrative of Dayton as an integrated city. As Hall argued, “What more important message can we impart than the message of racial harmony? What higher purpose can we call on for the National Park Service than to use history to teach future generations that blacks and whites can work together to achieve greatness?”⁶⁶ The supposed friendship between the Wrights and Dunbar illustrated an idealized, mutually beneficial interracial relationship, which allowed all parties to succeed. Representative Dave Hobson’s testimony reiterated this point. He argued that the friendship between the Wrights and Dunbar could not only “serve as a good example of how race relations should be today,” but was “one of the strongest themes we can promote and one of the things we should do.”⁶⁷

However, Hall and Hobson’s insistence on upholding the Wright-Dunbar friendship as an example of racial harmony obscured the reality of race relations in the early twentieth century. Though Hobson acknowledged “it presents what unfortunately is an

⁶⁴ States and Forests, 10; House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, *Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Preservation Act of 1991: Hearing before the Subcommittee*, 70; Edward Roach, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

⁶⁵ House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, *Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Preservation Act of 1991: Hearing before the Subcommittee*, 116; States and Forests, *Miscellaneous National Park and National Trails Measures*, 8–9, 135–36.

⁶⁶ House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, *Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Preservation Act of 1991: Hearing before the Subcommittee*, 42.

⁶⁷ House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, 43, 55; Madeline Iseli-Smith to Ron Grimes, “Fax Memorandum,” June 3, 1992, 3–4, folder 4, box 343, Senate Papers, John H. Glenn Archives, Ohio State University. Don Castleberry made a similar argument.

unusual theme,” he did not elaborate.⁶⁸ While their friendship, had it truly existed, certainly would be something to admire, Hall’s description ignored the circumstances making such a friendship so exceptional: racial laws forcing African Americans into second-class citizenship throughout the United States in the early twentieth century. In a column for the *Dayton Daily News*, Tillson argued that the friendship between the Wrights and Dunbar was an “especially remarkable story when you look back at it from the perspective of a century of deteriorating race relations.”⁶⁹ Proponents did not say whether the park would include this historical context in its framing of the friendship.

Ohio State Representative Rhine McLin explicitly stated the significance of the Wright-Dunbar friendship in relation to US history. She acknowledged “this is a time whereby little in history shows the relationship between black Americans and white Americans after the turn of the century. What I am speaking specifically to is from the end of slavery to the beginning of the civil rights movement. This was taking place during this time.”⁷⁰ For at least McLin, incorporating Dunbar and his relationship with the Wrights not only portrayed an unusual friendship but also “tells the story of the African-American experience in urban America at the turn of the century.”⁷¹ Dunbar’s experience was important on its own, not only through his connection to the Wrights.

Beyond testifying before House and Senate subcommittees, park proponents went to great lengths to persuade members of Congress to support the bill. When Senator Dale Bumpers, chair of the Senate Subcommittee on Public Lands, National Parks, and Forests, opposed the park, the 2003 Fund Committee orchestrated a trip to Dayton for his wife Betty. Mary Mathews, executive director of Carillon Historical Park, invited Betty Bumpers to Dayton under the pretense of appointing her an honorary co-chair of an inoculation program at the Children’s Medical Center. While she was in Dayton, Mathews arranged for her to meet Wick Wright, who took her on a tour of his family sites. By Mathews’s account, Betty was deeply impressed by the Wright brothers’ history. She asked, “Does Dale know about this?” Mathews told her that they hoped she would tell him.⁷²

Senator Metzenbaum allegedly was the key to passing the legislation. Sharkey referred to him as “our secret weapon.” Not only did Metzenbaum commit to the park proposal early on; he “played hardball” to get it through the Senate, though Sharkey

⁶⁸ House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, *Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Preservation Act of 1991: Hearing before the Subcommittee*, 55.

⁶⁹ Tillson, “Capital Trip Highlights Dayton’s Aviation History.”

⁷⁰ House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, *Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Preservation Act of 1991: Hearing before the Subcommittee*, 76.

⁷¹ *House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands*, 77. Rice makes this same argument in passing. States and Forests, *Miscellaneous National Park and National Trails Measures*, 135–36.

⁷² Sharkey, Oral History II, 65–66; Watson to Grimes, “Action Memorandum: Dayton Park Status Report,” March 17, 1992; Mary Mathews, Oral History, interview by Edward Roach, October 6, 2006, 4–5, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

admitted he had “never been able to confirm the things that [Sharkey thought] he did.” According to Sharkey, when a Senator put the legislation on hold, Metzenbaum responded by putting every piece of this Senator’s legislation on hold too, “no matter what committee it was on, no matter what it was,” until he agreed to release the hold on the park.⁷³

The House passed the bill 278-133 on March 4, 1992. The Senate passed the bill by voice vote on October 1. President George H. W. Bush signed the legislation on October 16, 1992. Though his signature created the park, Bush remained unconvinced that the park was necessary. The statement issued at the signing noted that he “questioned the wisdom of establishing new units of the National Park Service when the Congress is not providing the existing system with adequate funding.” Despite creating the new park, Congress had also reduced the NPS’s overall budget.⁷⁴

Issues with the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission

Bush’s signing of the bill led to new issues. The bill created the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission (DAHC) and specified that the US Secretary of the Interior would appoint commission members at the recommendation of specified state and local officials. As NPS officials had predicted in their congressional testimony on the bill, the constitutionality of these appointments was called into question. Bush alleged that the language of the bill violated the appointments clause of the Constitution in that it limited the “Secretary’s discretion.” He signed the bill with the understanding that the commission would function in an advisory role and would “not exercise Government power.”⁷⁵ Since the DAHC would have management authority, not merely an advisory role, it was particularly important that the appointees be selected only by the Secretary. Otherwise, the commission would be carrying out the work of the federal government at the appointment of local and state officials.⁷⁶

⁷³ Sharkey, Oral History II, 69–71.

⁷⁴ Michelle Ruess, “Park Called Pork,” *Plain Dealer*, March 4, 1992; “Ohio Lobbying Wins Park Bills Passage,” *The Plain Dealer*, March 5, 1992; Michael Gessel and Tony Hall to Ron Grimes and John Glenn, “Memorandum,” September 8, 1992, John H. Glenn Archives, Ohio State University; George Bush, “Statement on Signing the Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Act of 1992,” October 16, 1992, folder 10, box 10, Bill Gibson Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage Park Library; George T. Frampton Jr., “Letter to Representative Tony P. Hall from George T. Frampton, Jr., Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, US Department of the Interior,” May 3, 1994, folder 10, box 1, Bill Gibson Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁷⁵ Carol Aten to Don Castleberry, “Keweenaw and Dayton Aviation Commission,” February 18, 1993, folder 5, box 343, Senate Papers, John H. Glenn Archives, Ohio State University; Bush, “Statement on Signing the Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Act of 1992”; Frampton, Jr., “Letter to Representative Tony P. Hall, May 3, 1994,” May 3, 1994.

⁷⁶ Gessel and Hall to Grimes and Glenn, “Memorandum,” September 8, 1992.

In an attempt to remedy this, Representative Hall introduced H.R. 606 in 1995. It clarified that the Secretary would make the appointments “after consideration of recommendations made by those public officials.” Glenn and newly elected Ohio Senator Mike DeWine (R) introduced similar legislation, S. 392, in the Senate. The legislation was passed as part of the Omnibus Parks and Public Land Management Act.⁷⁷ While Congress worked on amending the bill, the Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt, sent letters to his desired appointees, including Wright brothers’ descendent Wick Wright. Until the constitutionality issue was resolved, however, the appointees would merely advise.⁷⁸

Even once the authority of the DAHC had been legislatively clarified, the commission was slow to act. In addition to Wick Wright, Babbitt appointed 2003 Fund Committee members Jerry Sharkey and Walter Rice. The other ten members were Rhine McLin (Ohio State Representative and Wright-Dunbar neighborhood resident), Ervin J. Nutter (Greene County resident), Gary C. Ness (Ohio Historical Society), Margaret E. Peters (Association for Study of Afro-American Life and History), Roberta Johnson (Wright-Dunbar neighborhood resident), William Estabrook (former city manager of Dayton), W. Reed Madden (Greene County Commissioner), Lynn E. Wolaver (mayor of Fairborn, Ohio), Leon Glaspell (Wright-Patterson Air Force Base), and William W. Schenk (Midwest Area Field Director of NPS).⁷⁹ Many of these commissioners had other obligations, and the commission lacked a clear focus, with members unsure how to move forward. The commission met monthly in Dayton, beginning in 1995, with Sharkey serving as chairperson. However, it was not until Tony Sculimbrene, a former employee of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, was hired as executive director at the end of 1998 that the DAHC began its work in earnest.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ John Glenn to Frank Murkowski, May 3, 1995, folder 5, box 343, Senate Papers, John H. Glenn Archives, Ohio State University. In Glenn’s letter, he incorrectly says S. 372. Metzenbaum did not run for reelection in 1994. “H.R. 4236: Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996, 104th Cong.,” Pub. L. No. 104-333 (1996), <https://www.congress.gov/104/plaws/publ333/PLAW-104publ333.pdf>.

⁷⁸ Bruce Babbitt to Wilkinson Wright, January 31, 1995, folder 5, box 343, Senate Papers, John H. Glenn Archives, Ohio State University. Babbitt to Wright. Ron Grimes to John Glenn, “Action Memorandum,” February 8, 1995, folder 5, box 343, Senate Papers, John H. Glenn Archives, Ohio State University.

⁷⁹ “Letters of Appointment Sent to the Following,” n.d., folder 5, box 343, Senate Papers, Glenn Senate Papers, Ohio State University; National Park Service, “General Management Plan: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park,” National Park Service, February 28, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/daav/getinvolved/general-management-plan.htm>.

⁸⁰ “2003 Fund Committee National Park Sub-Committee Meeting Minutes,” April 18, 1995, folder 7, box 19, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections; “Minutes of the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission,” February 26, 1996, folder 15, box 333, Senate Papers, John H. Glenn Archives, Ohio State University, The commission voted to make Sculimbrene executive director at the meeting, dependent upon approval from the air force; William Gibson, Oral History 2007, interview by Ed Roach and Ann Honious, April 17, 2007, 11, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library. Sculimbrene started in January of 1999. He had previously been the air force representative on the commission, replacing Leon Glaspell; Tony Sculimbrene, Oral History, interview by Edward J. Roach, August 24, 2006, 3–6, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

In the mid-1990s, the DAHC focused its attention on a management plan. Along with Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP staff, the commission presented three management options—the Standard Park Unit, Confederation, and Federation. The Standard Park Unit formed a “small, traditional entry level park.” The focus would remain on the core parcel of the Hoover Block and Wright Cycle Company building, with the NPS providing interpretive guidance to the other park sites. As the park’s funding grew, greater attention would be paid to the other park sites. The Confederation plan outlined “full and equal partnership of many in Dayton and the Miami Valley” and was identified as the true “spirit of the legislation.” Each site in the park would function independently, while under a board of cooperative partners. The third plan, Federation, required sites to comply with NPS standards and interpretation, but membership was voluntary. Sites would continue to operate independently, though the NPS would function as the leader, making recommendations and setting standards.⁸¹ The DAHC also concentrated on developing transportation among the different sites and working with the city to redevelop the historic district surrounding the core parcel.⁸²

Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP in the Twenty-First Century

Once the park was authorized, the NPS and the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission set to work preserving the resources and managing the park. In the ten years following the park’s creation, Dayton-area legislators, activists, and community members continued to advocate on its behalf, arguing to add additional aviation sites to the park and change the name to include Dunbar. In 2000, Representative Tony Hall introduced legislation to include the Setzer Building, adjacent to the Hoover Block, as well as two additional properties, 26 and 30 South Williams Street. The newly built additions at Carillon Historical Park were also added “collectively as the John W. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers Aviation Center.” The bill removed the cap on appropriated funds for the sites owned by entities other than the NPS. It became law in October 2000.⁸³

⁸¹ “Minutes of the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission.”

⁸² Ronald W. Johnson, “The Success of Planning Partnerships: Three National Park Service Case Studies,” *George Wright Forum* 19, no. 1 (2002): 84. Ronald W. Johnson, “Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park—A Non-Traditional Park Takes Off,” *Cultural Resource Management* 22, no. 5 (1999): 26–29.

⁸³ “Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Amendments Act of 2000, H.R. 5036, 106th Cong.,” Pub. L. No. 106–356 (2000), <https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/106/356.pdf>. Mike DeWine introduced a companion bill in the Senate. “Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Amendments Act of 2000, S. 2959, 2d. Sess.,” *Congressional Record Daily Edition* 146, no. 116 (September 27, 2000): H 8134–H 8144.

In 2003, Walter Rice, Tony Perfilò, and John Bosch formed the Aviation Heritage Foundation (AHF). The original park legislation mandated the sunset of the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission on January 1, 2004, and stipulated a plan for a “permanent organizational structure” to manage aviation sites.⁸⁴ The AHF fulfilled that role as a nonprofit organization, rather than a federal commission. It replaced the DAHC in overseeing the park sites and would additionally manage the National Aviation Heritage Area that had by then been proposed.⁸⁵ Tony Sculimbrenne was again hired as executive director. Though the Aviation Heritage Foundation replaced the DAHC, it broadened its scope beyond the sites within the national park unit, while no longer working to rehabilitate the West Dayton neighborhood.⁸⁶

In 2006, members of the original 2003 Fund Committee again headed to Washington. Accompanied by some new faces, including Amanda Wright Lane, following the death of her father Wick Wright, the group lobbied Congress to change the name of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. Representative Michael Turner (R-OH-3) had introduced the bill in the House in late 2005, while Senator Mike DeWine sponsored it in the Senate.⁸⁷ The name Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP did not adequately reflect the true purpose of the park, they argued. They proposed the new name of Wright Brothers-Dunbar National Historical Park, removing aviation entirely from the title. As explained by Christopher K. Jarvi, NPS Associate Director of Partnerships, Interpretation and Education, Volunteers, and Outdoor Recreation, “while Congress has defined a relatively broad mandate and mission for the park, we believe that its core purpose is to commemorate three individuals, Wilbur and Orville Wright and Paul Laurence Dunbar.”⁸⁸ In contrast to early arguments for the park that focused on the importance of Dayton the city and West Dayton the neighborhood, these later proponents focused on the people. The people, not the location, made the area significant.

The name change related to Dunbar. As the Wright brothers’ great-grand-niece Amanda Wright Lane argued before the legislative subcommittee, advocates of the new moniker wanted to see Dunbar given proper recognition in the park name. “The Park is not telling the story of Dunbar as an aviator,” Wright Lane argued, “but telling his life story as a ‘man of letters,’ in a time when few African-Americans were given the opportunity to write professionally.” Instead of emphasizing his friendship with Orville and Wilbur,

⁸⁴ Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Amendments Act of 2000, H.R. 5036, 106th Cong., § 202.

⁸⁵ Lawrence Blake, Oral History, interview by Ed Roach, March 20, 2006, 10–11, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Mathews, Oral History, 10.

⁸⁶ Sculimbrenne, Oral History, 32–33.

⁸⁷ “Wright Brothers-Dunbar National Historical Park Designation Act, H.R. 4612, 109th Cong., 2d. Sess.” (2005); Mike DeWine, “Dayton Wright Brothers-Dunbar National Historical Park Designation Act, S. 3712, 109th Cong., 2d Sess.” (2006).

⁸⁸ Christopher Jarvi, “Statement of Christopher Jarvi,” Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs, US Department of the Interior, April 27, 2006, <https://www.doi.gov/ocl/hr-4612>.

Wright Lane focused on the similarities between the brothers and Dunbar: “Like the Wright brothers, his story is one of overcoming obstacles.”⁸⁹ Clearly, even the original advocates of the national park felt they had not fully incorporated Dunbar or given him the recognition he deserved. Yet, despite this advocacy, the House never voted on the bill.⁹⁰

In an interview given in 2005, the same year she testified before Congress, Wright Lane reflected on Dunbar’s inclusion in the park. While she recognized similarities and connections between Dunbar and her ancestors, such as “being people that followed their instincts, followed what they felt was right,” she wondered, “if [Dunbar’s] story would be better served somewhat separated from the Wrights’ because I think, unfortunately, it gets lost.”⁹¹ Though the park honored all three men in theory, its emphasis on aviation often obscured Dunbar, giving the appearance that he remained an afterthought. Representative Turner introduced the same legislation again in 2007. This time, the House passed the bill, but it never made it out of committee in the Senate.⁹²

The following year, Turner introduced another bill, which would change the park’s name and add Hawthorn Hill and the Wright Company factory buildings to the park. Senator Sherrod Brown introduced similar legislation to add the Wright home and factory buildings. Wright Lane again testified.⁹³ NCR had donated Hawthorn Hill to the Wright Family Foundation in 2006, with the hope that it would eventually become part of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP.⁹⁴ Less than two weeks after the donation was announced, an editorial appeared in the *Dayton Daily News* criticizing Oakwood residents for preventing its addition to the national historical park in the 1990s and arguing that the home should now be affiliated with the NPS. The editorial board wrote, “If Ohio’s senators and House members can’t get Congress to allow (and fund) the National Park Service to help in that effort, there’s something wrong with their salesmanship.”⁹⁵

⁸⁹ “Testimony Amanda Wright Lane, Great Grandniece of the Wright Brothers, Aviation Heritage Foundation, Inc. Trustee, Wright Family Foundation On HR 4612” (April 27, 2006). The name change was also to prevent a Wright Brothers National Museum being created elsewhere. Per Heckman comment, draft 1.

⁹⁰ Wright Brothers-Dunbar National Historical Park Designation Act, H.R. 4612, 109th Cong., 2d. sess.

⁹¹ Amanda Wright Lane, Oral History, interview by Edward Roach, September 21, 2006, 5, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁹² “Wright Brothers-Dunbar National Historical Park Designation Act, H.R. 4191, 110th Cong., 2d Sess.” (2008).

⁹³ “To Amend the Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Act of 1992 to Add Sites to the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, and for Other Purposes, 110th Cong., 2d Sess.,” Pub. L. No. to accompany H.R. 4199 (2008). Sherrod Brown, “To Amend the Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Act of 1992 to Add Sites to the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, and for Other Purposes, S. 3286, 110th Cong., 2d Sess.” (2008); “Local Headlines,” *Dayton Daily News*, June 6, 2008.

⁹⁴ Timothy R. Gaffney, “Wrights’ Home Back to Family,” *Dayton Daily News*, August 19, 2006; Brady Kress, Oral History, interview by Susan Ferentinos, September 15, 2021, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁹⁵ “NCR Did Right by Wrights, Dayton,” *Dayton Daily News*, August 25, 2006.

And yet, despite support from the Wright family and NCR, Oakwood residents again worried about the proposition. In the words of Dayton History Executive Director Brady Kress, when Oakwood heard of the property transfer, “it got really messy, and the neighbors went berserk.”⁹⁶ In Kress’s recollection:

They had blown this up into, “we’re going to have Yellowstone in the middle of our neighborhood,” and there would be uniformed rangers everywhere. There would be all this traffic; there would be a ranger station at the base of the driveway. It was as if they were building a Burger King in their front yard or something. . . . You have this internationally known figure, his house is all of the sudden no longer going to be in private hands; it’s not going to be a corporate guest house anymore. It’s going to be a public venue; that just scared the heck out of these neighbors.⁹⁷

However, in this second round, Oakwood residents were unsuccessful in their attempts to prevent the house’s addition to the national historical park. By the time Hawthorn Hill was being considered for inclusion in the boundaries of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, the Wright Family Foundation had entered into an agreement with Dayton History to operate historic tours of the house. Kress posited that Dayton History’s involvement quelled some residents’ concerns. “Luckily, as [Dayton History] already had this umbrella organization, we already owned multiple properties. We operated them [as historic sites], but I think from the neighbor’s perspective, we were privately owned, locally controlled. So, they were very much in favor of the house going to us.”⁹⁸ Representative Turner introduced the bill to expand the park boundaries again the following year without the name change. It eventually became part of the omnibus land bill of 2009 and passed on March 25. President Barack Obama signed the bill on March 30, 2009.⁹⁹

Most recently, the park added a national museum. In 2018, the John W. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers Aviation Center at Carillon Historical Park (now part of Dayton History) became the John W. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers National Museum.¹⁰⁰ Turner had first introduced the bill in the House in 2013 and then again in 2015. Senator Rob Portman had

⁹⁶ Kress, Oral History; see also, John Nolan, “Hawthorn Hill Could Be Transferred to Control of National Park Service—Proposal Would Give Public Access to the Wrights’ Longtime Home and the Former Airplane Factory,” *Dayton Daily News*, January 30, 2007; Helen Bebbington, “Residents Fear Tours Will Disrupt Neighborhood—Harman Avenue Folks Attend the Council Meeting to Discuss the Future of Hawthorn Hill,” *Dayton Daily News*, February 22, 2007.

⁹⁷ Kress, Oral History.

⁹⁸ Kress.

⁹⁹ Michael Turner, “To Amend the Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Act of 1992 to Add Sites to the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, and for Other Purposes, H.R. 286, 111th Cong.” (2009); “Public Law 111-11: Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009; Section 7117, Dayton Aviation Heritage Boundary Expansion” (2009), <https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/111/11.pdf>.

¹⁰⁰ Sarah Franks, “Dayton Now Home to Wright Brothers National Museum,” *Dayton Daily News*, August 31, 2018. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2017 included the name change. “National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017,” Pub. L. No. 114–328, 130 STAT. 2000 (2016).

sponsored it in the Senate in 2015. The name change demonstrated that the site was incorporated into the National Park System, despite being privately owned and managed.¹⁰¹ While the new name did not come with additional funding or changes to the site's operation, the addition of the phrase National Museum signified the site's "national importance."¹⁰²

Conclusion

Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP resulted from a local effort to celebrate Dayton's past, at a moment when its fortunes were in steep decline. A group of local boosters saw in the city's aviation history both a point of civic pride and an opportunity to bring desperately needed tourist dollars to the struggling city. After deciding the National Park Service could best preserve the few remaining aviation sites in Dayton, the group strategically included the Paul Laurence Dunbar House in an effort to garner support within the West Dayton community and the NPS. After persuading first the local community and then Congress to support their vision, the national historical park was authorized in December 1992.

The resulting park honored the Wright brothers' accomplishments through their bicycle shop, print shop, and the field and plane they used to complete their first practical flight. It also included Dunbar's house, in an effort to recapture life in Dayton in the early twentieth century. Although the members of the 2003 Fund Committee successfully included Dunbar and his house in the park, his inclusion emphasized his secondary role. He was the embodiment of the neighborhood context that created the Wright brothers and the unique character of Dayton that led to the world-changing invention of the airplane. It was not Dunbar's poetry that led park supporters to insist on his inclusion. Instead, they emphasized his relationship with the Wrights, however tenuous. It was through their friendship that Dunbar became meaningful and significant to the park. As an African American man, his friendship demonstrated the progressiveness of the Wrights, another surprising quality they possessed for their time. The Wright-Dunbar relationship became a symbol of Dayton's extraordinary history and the hope for its future. Park supporters held the friendship up as both a point of pride and an example to be emulated.

¹⁰¹ Michael Turner, "To Amend the Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Act of 1992 to Rename a Site of the Park, H.R. 1574" (2013); Michael Turner, "To Amend the Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Act of 1992 to Rename a Site of the Park, H.R. 202, 114th Cong." (2015); Rob Portman, "A Bill to Amend the Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Act of 1992 to Rename a Site of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, S. 1007, 114th Congress" (2015); Franks, "Dayton Now Home to Wright Brothers National Museum."

¹⁰² Shannon S. Loane, "National Museums: In Brief" (Congressional Research Service, April 8, 2019), 1.

CHAPTER FIVE

Park Partners

Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park (NHP) was established as a partnership park, meaning that ownership and management of park resources were shared between the National Park Service (NPS) and other specified entities. This type of park was a popular choice in the 1990s, as the federal government sought to reduce the costs of resource ownership and staffing. Partnership parks are also common in urban areas because of the complex politics and many stakeholders to be found in US cities. Finally, these park units represent a management trend of the NPS, which for the last thirty years has sought to create a “culture of collaboration” between its staff and local communities. The idea and history of partnership parks are discussed in Chapter 2, “The Federal Government in the Post-Industrial City.” However, it is worth repeating that national park units that are managed in partnership bring an added level of complications with regard to logistics, management of resources, interpretation, and providing a consistent visitor experience.¹

This chapter discusses those entities with which Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP collaborates, including legislated partners, formal partners, and more informal relationships with groups that can be described as “friends of the park.” A brief history of each organization and its relationship to Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP is included. The history of the park’s cultural resources and their management by partners is discussed in Chapter 8, “Cultural Resource Management.”

Aviation Trail, Inc.

As detailed in Chapter 3, “The Beginnings of Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park,” Aviation Trail, Inc. (ATI) played a major role in preserving Dayton’s historic sites related to aviation. The organization is responsible for saving the buildings in Dayton

¹ Laura B. Comay, *National Park Service: Partnership Parks and Programs*, electronic resource (Washington, DC: Library of Congress Congressional Research Service, 2011), i, 1; Barry Mackintosh, Janet A. McDonnell, and John H. Sprinkle, *The National Parks: Shaping the System*, 4th ed., reprinted in *George Wright Forum*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2018) (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2018), 76; National Park Service Stewardship Institute, “Urban Agenda: Call to Action Initiative” (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, March 2015), 27, https://www.nps.gov/subjects/urban/upload/UrbanAgenda_web.pdf; Rolf Diamant, “An Urban Parks Agenda for Everyone?,” *George Wright Forum* 31, no. 2 (2014): 109. Quotation from Diamant.

Aviation Heritage NHP's core parcel, and members of ATI were some of the earliest advocates of creating a national park unit devoted to Dayton's aviation heritage. Interestingly, ATI was not mentioned in the 1992 legislation establishing Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, because by the time of park authorization, ATI had agreed to deed the Hoover Block and the Wright Cycle Company to the NPS. The group did not become a legislated partner to the park until 2000, when the Setzer Building (now also known as the Aviation Trail building), which ATI owns, was added to the park's boundaries.² Nevertheless, given ATI's interwoven history with Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, it has been a close partner to the park since the park's conception.

ATI incorporated on August 3, 1981. John C. Dussault, an executive with McCauley Propeller, was the organization's first president. Mary Ann Johnson, an economic planner with the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission, was secretary.³ The group's stated goal was "to educate regarding aviation history of the area including activities related thereto."⁴ The group arose out of an idea to draw tourists to the area, which was struggling in the face of deindustrialization. It would link the various aviation sites spread throughout the Miami Valley by way of a conceptual "Aviation Trail" and produce a guidebook to allow visitors to better access information about these sites. As of 2022, ATI still manages the Aviation Trail, which currently has seventeen sites open to the public, including the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center. Other trail sites within the park include the Wright Flyer III at Carillon Historical Park and Huffman Prairie Flying Field. Outside the park, the trail includes sites in Urbana, Ohio, including Grimes Flying Lab and the Champaign Aviation Museum. ATI provides a self-guided tour of these sites, as well as a bike route.⁵

In researching sites for the proposed trail, Johnson discovered that two buildings connected to the Wright brothers remained in Dayton, just a half-block away from each other. These buildings were the Wrights' third bicycle shop at 22 South Williams Street and an earlier printing shop, on the second floor of the Hoover Block, at 1060 West Third Street.⁶ ATI purchased the Hoover Block, along with the adjacent Setzer Building, in 1982

² "Public Law 102-419: To Establish the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park" (1992), <https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/102/419.pdf>; Tony Hall, "Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Amendments Act of 2000, H.R. 5036, 106th Cong., 2nd Sess.," P.L. 106-356 § (2000).

³ Aviation Trail, Inc., "Proposed Development Plan for the Wright Brothers Inner West Enterprise Zone (Draft)" (Dayton, OH: Aviation Trail Inc, March 1982), folder: ATI Reports, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections. Mary Ann Johnson, Oral History, interview by Ann Deines, February 21, 1996, 3-4, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁴ Ohio Secretary of State, "Articles of Incorporation of Aviation Trail" (Ohio Department of State, August 3, 1981).

⁵ "ATI Trail Sites," Aviation Trail, Inc., 2021, <https://www.aviationtrailinc.org/copy-of-trail-sites>.

⁶ Jerry Sharkey, Oral History I, interview by Ann Deines, February 16, 1996, 13, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Johnson, Oral History, 12; Michael J. McManus, "Aviation Theme for Dayton," *Indiana Gazette*, July 1, 1985. The newspaper describes the building not as a home, but "in a ghetto where it was a speakeasy selling homemade liquor." The Hoover Block's address is sometimes listed as 16 S. Williams Street.

for \$30,000. The following year, 1983, the group also purchased 22 South Williams for \$11,620.58.⁷ It then shifted its focus to restoring and preserving the Wright Cycle Company building (22 S. Williams Street).

In 1988, ATI opened the building as a small museum and gift shop, open on the weekends. The group hired Mike Nelson to staff the museum when it was open to visitors, and Nelson became Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's first interpretive ranger (seasonal), continuing on in this capacity until 1996.⁸ ATI finished restoration of the Wright Cycle Company building in 1992, the same year Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was authorized.⁹ Notably, 1992 was also the year that the Setzer Building (owned by ATI and not slated to become part of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP) partially collapsed. ATI worked with the city of Dayton to shore up the building façade, but the rest of the building would need to be rebuilt.¹⁰

ATI, as a group, was initially skeptical about the idea of creating a national historical park in Dayton. The initial goals of ATI were to preserve aviation history and educate the public. However, ATI members did not all agree on the best means to accomplish these goals. As ATI co-founder Gerald "Jerry" Sharkey later summarized, "There was never a grand plan that it be a national park from the beginning, there was never a plan to save the bicycle shop, there was never a plan to...yeah, we were floating."¹¹ Sharkey eventually joined with other local residents to form another organization, the 2003 Fund Committee, to pursue the goal of preserving the larger area surrounding the two Wright buildings and explore the idea of seeking NPS involvement. Some members of ATI were involved and supportive of the idea of a national park unit, though the organization as a whole was not. Many members of ATI felt that "having the bike shop and...maybe bringing the Hoover Block up eventually was fine, that there didn't need to be more."¹²

⁷ Aviation Trail, Inc., "Chronology Update" (n.d.), folder 26, box 1, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections. Numerous ATI sources list 1982 as the year the group purchased the Wright Cycle Company, while other ATI sources list 1983. However, the deed lists 1983 as the purchase date. See Montgomery County Recorder of Deeds, "Deed Record R72-08601-0060" (Dayton, July 27, 1983), folder 14, box 1, Bill Gibson Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁸ Michael Nelson, Oral History, interview by Casey Huegel, May 29, 2015, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library. Ann Honious also remembers Jerry Sharkey staffing the bicycle shop in its early years, but neither the Sharkey oral histories or the Mike Nelson oral history mention this. Ann Honious, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

⁹ "Aviation Trail Timeline/Sequence" (n.d.), folder 1, box 1, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections; Nelson, Oral History, 7–8.

¹⁰ Steve Brown, Oral History, interview by Casey Huegel, January 13, 2016, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

¹¹ Sharkey, Oral History I, 53.

¹² Brad Tillson, Oral History, interview by Ann Deines, February 29, 1996, 16–17.

Following the authorization of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, some members of ATI remained ambivalent about the group's relationship with the park. As part of the park legislation, ownership of the Wright Cycle Company building and the Hoover Block was transferred to the NPS in 1996, relieving ATI of their care. Ceding ownership of the buildings was controversial within ATI. For some, such as Johnson and Sharkey, selling the buildings was necessary to accomplish the kind of restoration they envisioned. It was also a requirement of the park that the NPS own some property within the park boundaries. For others within ATI, selling the buildings was akin to losing the purpose of the organization. As 2003 Fund Committee member Brad Tillson recounted in 1996, "some of them felt that that was really their identity."¹³ After the NPS assumed ownership of the Wright Cycle Company and the Hoover Block, ATI continued to operate the cycle shop museum and gift shop. NPS assisted with marketing and staffing. With NPS involvement, the shop saw a 78 percent increase in sales.¹⁴ ATI also provided office space to the first on-site NPS employees on the second floor of the cycle shop.¹⁵

Even after Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP took over the Hoover Block and the Wright Cycle Company, ATI remained an involved partner. The two organizations communicated closely as ATI worked to rebuild the collapsed Setzer Building. The organization hired Paul and Steve Brown, ATI members who had a father-and-son architectural firm, to head up the project. Eventually, the architectural firm hired by the NPS to renovate the Hoover Block, Quinn Evans, subcontracted to the Browns, so that the two projects could be completed in tandem.¹⁶

In 1999, ATI and the NPS formalized their relationship by entering into a general agreement. In this document, the two parties agreed to collaborate on the Setzer Building, which by then had been renamed the Aviation Trail Building. In this document, both parties agreed to coordinate activities related to preservation and interpretation. This phrasing was an apparent reference to the idea of joining the Hoover Block (which was then beginning rehabilitation to become the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center) and the Setzer/Aviation Trail Building and handling visitor orientation for both the Aviation Trail and the park at this interpretive center. In this document, the parties also agreed

to initiate the development of a separate agreement or agreements to jointly restore, develop, and maintain the Hoover Block and the Aviation Trail Building (historically known as the Setzer Building), adjoining to the east and

¹³ Tillson, 19.

¹⁴ William Gibson, "Superintendent's Report, FY 1996" (Dayton: National Park Service, 1996), 2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library. Before Eastern National took over bookstore operations at Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center in 2002, the Wright Cycle Company gift shop was the only space within the park where sales items were available. Edward Roach, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

¹⁵ Johnson, Oral History, 45.

¹⁶ Brown, Oral History, 7-8.

the Wright Dunbar Plaza adjoining to the south, as a single visitor use facility that incorporates public exhibit space, a theater, bookstore/sales area, meeting/conference area, and office space for both organizations to ensure the preservation of the Hoover Block, as an [sic] significant Wright-related site in Dayton. Handicap access, means of emergency egress, elevator, restrooms, and utility systems serving the combined requirements of both structures will be contained within the Aviation Trail Building to preserve the historical character of the Hoover Block.¹⁷

The 1999 general agreement was accompanied by a “Letter of Intent” between the two organizations, dated the same day as the general agreement, again stipulating that the two parties would enter into a “partnership agreement regarding the long-term use of the property known as the Aviation Trail Building (previously known as the Setzer Building) owned by ATI.” The letter goes on to state, “In addition, Aviation Trail, Inc. will authorize the National Park Service to modify this property for the specific purpose of preserving, developing, using, and interpreting the historic Hoover Block property.” The specific terms of the arrangement, according to the letter of intent, would be set forth in a legally binding document.¹⁸

A year after this agreement was signed, in 2000, the Setzer/Aviation Trail Building was added to Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP’s boundaries by an act of Congress.¹⁹ The NPS and ATI signed another agreement in 2001, outlining the relationship between the two organizations. Both organizations agreed to make the two buildings the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center and Aviation Trail Visitor Center, both of which would be operated by the park. ATI would retain ownership of the Aviation Trail Building, and the NPS would oversee all construction contracts, design, maintenance, housekeeping, and security for the building. The NPS agreed to lease space in the ATI building for \$21,353 each year. If ATI ever wanted to sell the building, the NPS was given the right of first refusal.²⁰

At one point in the early 2000s, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP actually received funding from the NPS to acquire the Setzer/Aviation Trail Building from ATI. However, the two organizations could not agree on a selling price. Based on the cost of reconstruction and the going rate of comparable properties throughout the region, ATI offered a selling price of approximately \$1.2 million. However, by law, the NPS can only pay local market value for property, and based on West Dayton real estate prices, the building was only assessed at \$750,000 to \$850,000. The federal allocation for the building’s purchase expired

¹⁷ US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, “General Agreement Number 1443GA629599001, with Aviation Trail, Inc.” (March 8, 1999), folder 36, box 19, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections.

¹⁸ National Park Service, “Letter of Intent,” March 8, 1999.

¹⁹ Hall, Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Amendments Act of 2000, H.R. 5036, 106th Cong., 2nd sess.

²⁰ National Park Service, “Property Development and Utilization Agreement Between the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park and Aviation Trail, Inc.,” April 11, 2001, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Staff Records.

in 2007, without the two organizations reaching an agreement. As a result, the park continues to lease the building from ATI and operate the facility. The agreement was set to expire in fiscal year 2021 but appears to have been extended one year. A new agreement will go into effect in October 2022.²¹

Legislated Partners

The original 1992 legislation authorizing Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP outlined four non-NPS partners who would manage the designated resources through cooperative agreements. The National Park Service would be the unifying body for resources included within the park. The agency would acquire the park's core parcel, composed of the Hoover Block and the Wright Cycle Company. Wright-Patterson Air Force Base would be the second partner and retain ownership of Huffman Prairie Flying Field. The Ohio Historical Society (now the Ohio History Connection), which operated the Paul Laurence Dunbar House, would serve as the third partner. Finally, Carillon Historical Park (now part of Dayton History) would be the fourth partner, as the owner of the 1905 Wright Flyer III and Wright Hall (now both part of the John S. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers National Museum). Aviation Trail, Inc., the organization so fundamental in establishing the park, was not listed as an official legislated partner. It was added as a partner in subsequent legislation, as was the Wright Brothers Family Foundation.²²

Wright-Patterson Air Force Base

As of 2015, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base (AFB) was the largest single-site employer in the state of Ohio, with over 27,000 employees. At that time, it was also the largest air force base in the world, in terms of employees. The base, in fact, has an operating appropriation and staffing levels larger than the entire National Park Service, according to former park superintendent Dean Alexander. It is located just outside the city of Dayton, in Greene County, Ohio, and comprises over 8,100 acres.²³

²¹ Edward Roach and Ann Honious, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted via email to Susan Ferentinos, February 15, 2022; Edward Roach, "RE: Questions: Sources," transmitted via email to Susan Ferentinos, May 27, 2022; Nicholas Georgeff, "RE: Cooperative Agreements," transmitted via email to Susan Ferentinos, May 25, 2022.

²² Public Law 102-419: To establish the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

²³ Air Force Life Cycle Management Center History Office, "Wright-Patterson Air Force Base: The First Century" (Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, OH: Air Force Materiel Command, 2015); Timothy R. Gaffney, *The Dayton Flight Factory: The Wright Brothers and the Birth of Aviation* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2014), 59; Dean Alexander, Comments to Draft 1 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, July 31, 2020.

Wright-Patterson AFB was created in 1948, shortly after the US Air Force became an independent branch of the military in 1947. However, the new base encompassed aviation-related military installations dating back to World War I. One of these older installations sat atop Huffman Prairie Flying Field, which had served as the Wright brothers' test field, where they improved upon their invention and demonstrated the potential of aviation. After this, but before the military, it was also the site of the Wright School of Aviation.²⁴

Huffman Prairie Flying Field (HPFF) was one of the four original parcels included in Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's enabling legislation, and thus Wright-Patterson AFB was one of the original legislated partners. In addition to the Wrights' flying field, the base included two other sites important to interpreting Dayton's aviation history, which have served as informal partners to the park, although not officially within park boundaries.

The National Museum of the US Air Force, on the grounds of Wright-Patterson AFB, is part of both the Aviation Trail and the National Aviation Heritage Area and receives in the ballpark of 830,000 visitors a year. Its focus is interpreting the history of military aviation, and so it is a good complement to the park's focus on interpreting Dayton's role in the history of aviation generally. The museum is the oldest and largest military aviation museum in the world and has at times served as Dayton's most visited attraction and the number one noncommercial tourist destination in the state of Ohio. It traces its beginnings to 1923 and has occupied its current location since 1971. However, it does not fall within the boundaries of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP.²⁵

The Wright Brothers Memorial, also on the grounds of Wright-Patterson AFB, is even more closely linked to the national historical park, although it is also not located within park boundaries. Dedicated in August 1940, the memorial predates the air force base and was an effort by local citizens to commemorate the Wright brothers' achievements. The memorial is located on a site known as Wright Brothers Hill, overlooking HPFF, and its current close associations to the park stem from its location next to the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center.²⁶

²⁴ Air Force Life Cycle Management Center History Office, "Wright-Patterson Air Force Base," 1–18; Ann Honious, *What Dreams We Have: The Wright Brothers and Their Hometown of Dayton, Ohio* (Fort Washington, PA: Eastern National, 2003), 164–67, 201–12.

²⁵ "ATI Trail Sites"; Barrie Barber, "Air Force Museum Attendance Drops after Initial Surge," *Dayton Daily News*, January 9, 2018, <https://www.daytondailynews.com/news/local-military/air-force-museum-attendance-drops-after-initial-surge/m30EryhFxG3ezqZflfSquM/>; National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan" (Denver: US Department of the Interior, 1997), 51–52; Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 212.

²⁶ Elizabeth Fraterrigo et al., *From Pasture to Runway: Huffman Prairie Flying Field, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Cultural Landscape Report, Landscape Implementation Plan, Interpretation Plan* (Omaha: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2002), 45–47; Jill O'Bright, David G. Richardson, and William S. Harlow, "Wright Cycle Company and Wright and Wright Printing," National Historic Landmark Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1990), 59, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/71986526>. Wright Brothers Hill was originally owned by the Miami Valley Conservancy District; it transferred to the US Air Force in 1978.

In addition to establishing Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP as a partnership park with specific collaborators, the 1992 enabling legislation directed the NPS to “provide interpretation of Huffman Prairie Flying Field on Wright Brothers Hill.”²⁷ Although the law provided no more detail, the park’s 1997 interpretive plan determined that this directive would be fulfilled through a satellite interpretive center at that location. To construct an interpretive facility on the grounds of an air force base, the NPS and the air force worked closely to design the building and its interpretation, the details of which are covered in Chapter 9, “Interpretation and Education.”

In designating an air force site as part of the park, Congress created the need for two federal agencies, with two organizational cultures and bureaucracies, to work together. 2003 Fund Committee member Brad Tillson identified this as one of the early challenges in developing the park. Although Wright-Patterson AFB supported the idea of the park and HPFF’s inclusion in it, there was still a substantial amount of negotiation between the US Department of Defense, which oversees the US Air Force, and the US Department of the Interior, which oversees the NPS. The 1990s was a decade when both agencies were becoming more collaborative with outside entities, and from Tillson’s perspective, the partnership between the National Park Service and the US Air Force at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP became “one of the poster childs” for interagency collaboration.²⁸ Jan Ferguson, longtime cultural resource manager for the base, concurred: “It’s always been somewhat kind of confusing for the base, for the park service and for the base, because our hierarchical structures are different. Wright-Patt has way many more levels of people involved, and the cultural resources manager is a staff-person—there is probably ten or twelve layers of management above that. And the park superintendent worked all of those levels; so the park superintendent could talk to anybody at any level.”²⁹

Over the years, however, both federal agencies have become more accustomed to working with outside partners. Paul Woodruff, a later cultural resource manager for the base (2009–19) did not recall any particular challenges of the relationship, and a 2011 congressional briefing statement on partnership parks noted that it was quite common for the NPS to partner with other federal agencies in these arrangements.³⁰

The current memorandum of agreement between Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP and Wright-Patterson AFB (2018) stipulates that the base provides maintenance and custodial services to Huffman Prairie Flying Field, the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center, and common-use infrastructure such as access roads. The park, in

²⁷ Public Law 102-419: To establish the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, Sec. 105(e).

²⁸ Brad Tillson, Oral History, interview by Ann Deines, February 29, 1996, 29–30, quotation from 30.

²⁹ Jan Ferguson, Oral History, interview by Casey Huegel, August 5, 2015, 4, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

³⁰ Paul Woodruff, Oral History, interview by Susan Ferentinos, October 15, 2021, 10–11, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Comay, *National Park Service: Partnership Parks*, i.

turn, provides interpretive services at both sites and provides staff at the interpretive center during all open hours. The base pays for the utilities and is responsible for compliance with the National Environmental Protection Act and the National Historic Preservation Act, while the NPS agrees to comply with air force directives and policies as they relate to the park's resources located within the air force base boundaries.³¹

The Ohio History Connection (Formerly the Ohio Historical Society)

The Ohio History Connection (OHC) formed in 1885 as the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society. It shortened its name to the Ohio Historical Society (OHS) in 1954 and adopted its current moniker in 2014. Since 1888, the organization has received state funding, and the governor has appointed members to its board of trustees. However, it remains a private nonprofit organization. As of 2022, the organization administers more than fifty state-owned historic sites throughout Ohio.³² The state of Ohio purchased the Paul Laurence Dunbar House in 1936 for \$4,680.87 and entrusted its management to the OHS. The house officially opened in 1938 as the “first publicly owned and second historic site in the United States to honor a black man.”³³

Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's 1992 enabling legislation included the Paul Laurence Dunbar House, making the OHS a legislated partner. After the authorization of the park, the NPS assisted the OHS with renovating the Cole and Mundage Houses, which are part of the Dunbar memorial—work that was completed in 1998. The NPS also participated in commemorations of Dunbar's death at Woodland Cemetery and dinners on the anniversary of his birth, and highlighted Dunbar at the Wright Cycle Company building during Black History Month.³⁴

After the 1990s rehabilitation, the NPS had limited involvement with the Dunbar House, suggesting a partnership that was less collaborative than the relationship with other park partners. The park superintendent reports from 2000 to 2003 mention NPS

³¹ “WP-508 MOA FT 2018 Final Rev26FEB2018: Memorandum of Agreement between Wright-Patterson Air Force Base (AFB) and Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, National Park Service (NPS)” (Dayton, February 26, 2018), Staff Files, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

³² “Ohio Historical Society,” in *Ohio History Central* (Ohio History Connection, 2020), https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Ohio_Historical_Society. “About Us: Ohio History Connection,” Ohio History Connection, 2022, <http://ohiohistory.org/about-us>.

³³ Benjamin Kline, “Companions of the Centennial,” *Dayton Daily News*, June 18, 2003; Dean Alexander, “Superintendent's Report, FY 2009-2011” (National Park Service, 2011), 16, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Laura Dempsey, “Aviation Trail Complete,” *Dayton Daily News*, June 27, 2003; “Ohio History Connection Proposal to Partner with DAAV on Management of the Dunbar House” (2017).

³⁴ Derek Ali, “Dunbar Complex Renovation Set,” *Dayton Daily News*, March 11, 1996. William Gibson, “Superintendent's Report, FY 1998” (Dayton: National Park Service, 1998), 4, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Gibson, “Superintendent's Report, FY 1996,” 1–2.

participation only in events commemorating Dunbar's birth and death.³⁵ The site underwent extensive renovations during this period, in preparation for the 2003 Centennial of Flight celebrations, with funding from the OHS; the NPS appears to have been only peripherally involved.³⁶

However, the OHS did participate in the Centennial of Flight events at the park. The Ohio State Historical Marker Program, managed by the OHS, presented a historical marker for the entrance of Huffman Prairie Flying Field, and during the centennial celebration, the Dunbar House hosted a performance of "Time Flies," a living-history play developed by Dayton History.³⁷ In 2005 and 2006, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP assisted the OHS with acquiring grants to develop curricula for the site. In this same period, again with NPS help, the OHS added an exterior lift to the Dunbar visitor center, making both the visitor center and the adjacent house more accessible.³⁸

³⁵ Lawrence Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2000" (National Park Service, 2000), 3, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Lawrence Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2001" (National Park Service, 2001), 4, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Lawrence Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2002" (National Park Service, 2002), 3, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Lawrence Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2003" (National Park Service, 2003), 3, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

³⁶ Benjamin Kline, "Dunbar House Getting Its Just Hues," *Dayton Daily News*, March 18, 2003; STRATA Architecture Inc., "Paul Laurence Dunbar House Cultural Landscape and Historic Structures Report [CLR/HSR], Volume 1" (Dayton: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, 2019), 2.50–2.53, <http://www.npshistory.com/publications/daav/clr-hsr-dunbar-house-v1.pdf>.

³⁷ Sean Strader, "Huffman Prairie: World's First Flying Field," *Dayton Daily News*, January 17, 2003; Ron Rollins, "Time Flies, When We're Having Fun," *Dayton Daily News*, July 13, 2003.

³⁸ Lawrence Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2004–2007" (National Park Service, 2007), 14, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.



The Ohio State Historical Marker erected in 2003 at Huffman Prairie Flying Field.
Image: Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

Financial constraints brought on by the Great Recession and state budget cuts limited the OHS's ability to collaborate with the park beginning in 2008.³⁹ The OHS first reduced the hours the Dunbar House was open to the public, going down to four days of visitation a week. In 2009, OHS employee LaVerne Sci retired after serving for twenty years as site manager at the Dunbar House. That same year, the OHS faced a \$2 million deficit, and the house closed to visitors.⁴⁰ The OHS negotiated an arrangement with Dayton History, another legislated park partner, where beginning in June 2009, Dayton History would handle day-to-day staffing and management of the Dunbar House. However, upon its reopening, the house's visitation hours further decreased, so that it was open only three days a week. Beginning in 2010, the NPS took on a greater role at the site, sending

³⁹ Lawrence Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2008" (National Park Service, 2008), 6, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Steve Bennish and Matt Sanctis, "Dunbar House Hours Trimmed amid State Budget Squeeze," *Dayton Daily News*, May 2, 2008.

⁴⁰ LaVerne Sci, Oral History, interview by Casey Huegel, May 14, 2015, 34–36, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Bennish and Sanctis, "Dunbar House Hours Trimmed"; STRATA Architecture Inc., "Dunbar House CLR/HSR, v. 1," 2.54; "Dunbar House Too Precious to Lock Up," *Dayton Daily News*, March 25, 2009.

interpretive staff and advising on rehabilitations to the pantry. Though Dayton History and the NPS handled the day-to-day activities of the Dunbar House, the OHS remained involved in rehabilitation and repair.⁴¹

In the early 2010s, however, three violent crimes occurred near the property, and Dayton History grew concerned for the safety of its staff working at the house.⁴² As described by Brady Kress, executive director of Dayton History:

The first incident was a call from the police and the fire department that there was a fire on the back part of the property. . . . Somebody had been murdered, they'd dumped the body behind the house, had thrown it, doused it with gasoline, and set this body on fire. . . . And so, that was tragic and scary, and something, you know, you don't think you're going to be dealing with things like that when you go to run a museum. And so, our programming people and our education team, they're over there. And, you know, literally they asked the police, "so what do we do about the blood?" I mean there was blood and these like char marks and stuff on the sidewalk. We're lucky it didn't catch the house on fire, because it was pretty close. . . .

It wasn't long after that, that there was another. It wasn't a body, but it was a stabbing victim, a young woman who was in the alley just behind the property. And so, again, we dealt with that. . . . At that point, it was getting more and more difficult to find the staff that wanted to be over there. We started to double-staff it so that nobody was ever there by themselves. . . . It was in that time period that the National Park Service got a security officer, which was nice because they could do the loop.

. . . And so then there was the incident where there was an active shooter. And we were meeting on the side porch—and I say we, not me, but my education director—was meeting on the side porch with someone who was hired by the state to do some repair work on the property, and they were on the side porch, and they hear gunshots moving toward them. Somebody runs right by them, collapses in the street, is bleeding, gunshots to the abdomen. They hear a couple more gunshots, and then somebody fleeing. They go out trying to help this guy. That was kind of it, with us having people stationed there. And this poor contractor's there trying to hold this poor guy's head up, he's bleeding and screaming. It was a mess. So, we call up the state; we had a meeting, and the park service was in that discussion as well.⁴³

⁴¹ Alexander, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009–2011," 16; James Cummings, "Dunbar House to Reopen Soon: Local History Group Steps in to Fill Gap after State Budget Cuts Forced Closure," *Dayton Daily News*, June 4, 2009; STRATA Architecture Inc., "Dunbar House CLR/HSR, v. 1," 2.54.

⁴² Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2008," 6; Alexander, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009–2011," 16; Jim DeBrosse, "New Deal Could Open Dunbar House by June—Ohio Historical Society Will Maintain Facility," *Dayton Daily News*, April 8, 2009; Dean Alexander, Oral History, interview by Casey Huegel, December 6, 2017, 7–9, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁴³ Brady Kress, Oral History, interview by Susan Ferentinos, September 15, 2021, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

As a result of these events, starting in 2015, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP became “a more regular partner” at the Dunbar House. Dayton History remained the local partner for the site, covering site maintenance, while Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP staffed the site, planned programming and events, and offered financial assistance and technical expertise. The park hosts a junior ranger program at the house as well.⁴⁴ The OHS, newly renamed the Ohio History Connection (OHC), continued to represent the state’s ownership of the home and remained responsible for capital improvements.⁴⁵ In 2017, the OHC proposed that the NPS become “the official site manager,” replacing Dayton History. Under this agreement, NPS would keep any revenue raised at the site and receive \$50,000 annually from the OHC, while the OHC would maintain its current role. This proposal, however, was not adopted.⁴⁶

In 2021, the agreement between Dayton History, the OHC, and the NPS expired and was not renewed. And so, at this point, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP is considered the local partner for the site.⁴⁷

Dayton History (Formerly Carillon Historical Park)

Dayton History, which became the parent organization of Carillon Historical Park in 2005, owns and operates the John S. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers National Museum at Carillon Historical Park. The national museum includes the 1905 Wright Flyer III, the first airplane capable of sustained controlled flight, and the historic building that houses it, Wright Hall. Dayton History owns and operates Hawthorn Hill, the Wright family home in Oakwood; it has managed the site since before it was added to the park boundary in 2009 and was gifted the property by the Wright Brothers Family Foundation in 2013. Additionally, from 2009 to 2021, Dayton History was involved in operating the Paul Laurence Dunbar State Memorial. In the original legislation (prior to the founding of Dayton History), however, Carillon Historical Park, as the owner of the Wright Flyer III, was the named park partner.

⁴⁴ Ohio History Connection, “Paul Laurence Dunbar House,” accessed May 27, 2020, <http://ohiohistory.org/visit/museum-and-site-locator/paul-laurence-dunbar-house>; DeBrosse, “New Deal Could Open Dunbar House by June”; Alexander, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2009–2011,” 16; Dean Alexander, “Dunbar House to Open More Days, Entrance Fee Eliminated Starting in April Press Release” (February 9, 2015), folder: Dunbar House, Dean Alexander Documents, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Staff Records. Quote from Alexander Press Release.

⁴⁵ “Trim the Tree This Year at the Dunbar House,” *Dayton Daily News*, December 19, 2015; Alexander, “Dunbar House to Open More Days, Entrance Fee Eliminated Starting in April Press Release.”

⁴⁶ Maggie Marconi to Dean Alexander, May 17, 2017, “Ohio History Connection Proposal to Partner with DAAV on Management of the Dunbar House.”

⁴⁷ Edward Roach, Oral History, interview by Susan Ferentinos, May 18, 2022, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park; Nicholas Georgeff, “RE: Cooperative Agreements,” transmitted via email to Susan Ferentinos, May 25, 2022.

Carillon Historical Park is a sixty-five-acre outdoor history park in Dayton, named for the carillon bell tower installed in 1942. Colonel Edward A. Deeds, chairman of the board of National Cash Register (NCR), and his wife Edith Walton Deeds had the bell tower built near the Great Miami River as a gift to the Dayton community. The Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architecture Firm—which also designed the local Wright Brothers Memorial overlooking Huffman Prairie—designed a park surrounding the carillon. Deeds then began assembling various historic buildings and innovations at the park. The result was an outdoor collection of over thirty historic structures similar to Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan.⁴⁸ Carillon Historical Park opened in 1950, and in 2005, it merged with the Montgomery County Historical Society to form a new organization, Dayton History.⁴⁹

Once the Wright Flyer III and surrounding exhibit hall became part of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP in 1992, the NPS provided technical assistance to Carillon Historical Park with regard to these resources. This assistance came quickly, as Carillon Park began a major rehabilitation of Wright Hall in the 1990s, which included climate stabilization critical to the long-term preservation of the flyer. The NPS worked with Carillon Historical Park on a historic structure report to guide the rehabilitation. Carillon Park reiterated the NPS's role in their own long-range plan for 1998 to 2003. They intended to “collaborate with the National Park Service to specify methods and improvements requisite to the role to be played with DAHNHP [Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park].” Collaborating with the NPS enabled Carillon Historical Park to bring its standards of care in line with professional best practices.⁵⁰

NPS technical assistance continued. As Wright brothers' interpretation expanded at Carillon Historical Park, the organization contracted with the NPS Harpers Ferry Center to produce a historic furnishings report for the replica bicycle shop that was part of the organization's interpretation. NPS Historical Technician Lauren Gurniewicz collaborated with Carillon Historical Park Curator Jeanne Palermo to draft a nomination to the National Register of Historic Places for the Deeds Carillon in 2000, and Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Historian Edward Roach revised and submitted the nomination in 2004. Roach also assists with preparing Carillon Historical Park's compliance documentation

⁴⁸ Carillon Historical Park, “About Us,” Dayton History, n.d., <https://www.daytonhistory.org/about-us/>; Mickey Davis, “Carillon Park Playing a Tune from History,” *Dayton Daily News*, February 24, 1991.

⁴⁹ National Park Service, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan,” 46; Benjamin Kline, “Dayton History Launched,” *Dayton Daily News*, August 25, 2005.

⁵⁰ National Park Service, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan,” 37; Blake, “Superintendent's Report, FY 2000,” 3–4; “Carillon Historical Park Long Range Plan, 1998–2003,” November 15, 1996, 2, Staff Files, Carillon Historical Park.

related to the National Historic Preservation Act.⁵¹ After the outdoor historical park became part of Dayton History, the NPS continued to financially assist and advise the organization on improvements to its various Wright-related sites.

Over the time Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP has been in operation, its partnership with Dayton History has grown. Although originally the two entities partnered only on the Carillon Historical Park site, in 2009 Dayton History assumed operational control of the Paul Laurence Dunbar State Memorial.⁵² The NPS again provided assistance in maintaining and interpreting the site, in collaboration with both Dayton History and the Ohio History Connection.⁵³ This arrangement ended in 2021. Dayton History has also expanded its partnership with the national park unit through Hawthorn Hill. When this site was added to Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's boundaries in 2009, it was owned by the Wright Family Foundation, but Dayton History was managing day-to-day operations. In 2013, the foundation gifted ownership of the house to Dayton History as well.⁵⁴

The Wright Brothers Family Foundation

Hawthorn Hill, the Wright family home from 1914 to 1948, was added to Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP in 2009. At that point, the house was in a transitional phase, having been donated to the Wright Brothers Family Foundation by NCR, but not yet operating as a historic site open to the public. The foundation was started in the 1990s by Orville and Wilbur's grand-nephew Wilkinson "Wick" Wright, to support the preservation and interpretation of sites related to the Wright brothers. Upon Wick's death in 1999, his daughter and son, Amanda Wright Lane and Stephen Wright, took over leadership of the foundation.⁵⁵

With the expansion of the park's boundaries to include Hawthorn Hill, the Wright Brothers Family Foundation became a legislated partner of the park. However, when the foundation gifted the house to Dayton History in 2013, that official role ceased. The

⁵¹ Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2000," 3–4; Jeanne Palermo and Lauren Gurniewicz, "Deeds Carillon, Dayton, OH," National Register of Historic Places District Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2000), <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/71990609>; Edward Roach, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted via email to Susan Ferentinos, February 15, 2022.

⁵² DeBrosse, "New Deal Could Open Dunbar House by June."

⁵³ Alexander, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009–2011," 16.

⁵⁴ "Public Law 111-11: Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009; Section 7117, Dayton Aviation Heritage Boundary Expansion" (2009), <https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/111/11.pdf>; Thomas Gnau, "Dayton History Now Owns Wright Brothers Mansion," *Dayton Daily News*, June 28, 2013; Kress, Oral History; National Park Service, "Cooperative Agreement between the National Park Service and Dayton History," September 14, 2016, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Staff Records.

⁵⁵ Public Law 111-11: Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009; Section 7117, Dayton Aviation Heritage Boundary Expansion; "The Wright Brothers Family Foundation," n.d., <https://thewrightbrothersfamilyfdn.org>.

foundation remains an important stakeholder and informal partner to Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, however, representing the Wright family's interests and advocating for support of the national park unit responsible for interpreting their ancestors' legacy.⁵⁶

The City of Dayton

Oddly, the 2009 legislation that added the Wright Company factory buildings to the boundaries of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP did not instruct the park to form a partnership with the buildings' owner. Most likely this was because Delphi, the entity that owned the buildings, had recently declared bankruptcy, so the future owner of the buildings was unclear.⁵⁷ Since the buildings were added to the park, they have gone through multiple owners, but as of 2022, they are owned by the city of Dayton.⁵⁸ The park has not yet entered into a cooperative agreement with the city concerning the management and operation of the factory site, but the General Management Plan Amendment currently underway at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP will no doubt make suggestions as to the future administration of the site.⁵⁹

Formal Partners

In addition to legislated partners, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP has numerous other partners, with whom the park collaborates through cooperative agreements, short-term collaborations for specific projects, or ongoing informal relationships. For the purposes of this study, formal partners are organizations that have a partnership with the park that is outlined through an ongoing cooperative agreement or memorandum of agreement.

The Aviation Heritage Foundation (Doing Business as the National Aviation Heritage Alliance)

The National Aviation Heritage Alliance (NAHA) is a private, nonprofit organization that “guides” the National Aviation Heritage Area, an NPS-recognized cultural landscape covering eight Ohio counties and representing this region's contributions to the history of

⁵⁶ Gnau, “Dayton History Now Owns Wright Brothers Mansion”; Amanda Wright Lane, Oral History, interview by Edward Roach, September 21, 2006, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁵⁷ “The Wright Company Factory Boundary Assessment and Environmental Assessment” (Dayton, OH: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, January 2006), Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁵⁸ Max Filby, “Wright Airplane Factory Placed on National Historic Registry,” *Dayton Daily News*, September 16, 2019.

⁵⁹ Jessica Wehrman, “Dayton Leaders to Present Ideas in D.C.—The Dayton Development Coalition's Fly-In Will Meet to Discuss Projects and Policies That Will Benefit the Area.,” *Dayton Daily News*, April 29, 2008; “Wright Plane Factory Too Significant to Lose,” *Dayton Daily News*, July 7, 2008.

aviation. The organization is “dedicated to leveraging and enhancing the resources of the Aviation Heritage Area and fostering collaboration among its partners to promote aviation heritage tourism and educate and inspire current and future generations.”⁶⁰

Described as “lived-in landscapes,” national heritage areas are distinct from national park units in that the federal government does not need to own any of the resources contained in a heritage area.⁶¹ Instead, the areas “remain under state, local, and/or private control, while receiving financial and technical aid from the Park Service.” Funding for national heritage areas is “provided through the Park Service’s Heritage Partnership Program in annual appropriations laws for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies.”⁶² Heritage areas are the result of grassroots and community efforts to preserve natural, historic, and cultural resources “united by a common theme.”⁶³ Congress created the first national heritage area in 1984. Between then and 2020, fifty-five heritage areas were created, each through a legislative act.⁶⁴ Ohio has one other national heritage area, the Ohio & Erie National Heritage Canalway, created in 1996. The National Aviation Heritage Area was designated by Congress in 2004, and the details of its creation appear in the next chapter, while the remainder of this section focuses on NAHA, the heritage area’s managing entity.⁶⁵

The National Aviation Heritage Area includes aviation sites across eight counties in Ohio.⁶⁶ In Montgomery County, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP comprises part of the “core area.” In addition to the national historical park, the heritage area includes Woodland Cemetery, the resting place of both Wilbur and Orville Wright, and the Wright State University Special Collections Library, which holds multiple collections related to aviation history. Other aviation sites in Greene, Miami, Clark, Warren, Champaign, Shelby, and Auglaize counties make up the rest of the core. The legislation also specifically adds the Neil Armstrong Air and Space Museum in Wapakoneta, Ohio, named for the first person to walk on the moon, who was from this small Ohio town.⁶⁷ In 2008, NAHA reported that

⁶⁰ National Aviation Heritage Alliance, “National Aviation Heritage Area General Management Plan Executive Summary” (Dayton: Aviation Heritage Foundation, May 2008), 1.

⁶¹ National Park Service Stewardship Institute, “Urban Agenda,” 13.

⁶² Comay, *National Park Service: Partnership Parks*, 10.

⁶³ National Aviation Heritage Alliance, “NAHA General Management Plan Executive Summary,” 3.

⁶⁴ National Park Service, “What Is a National Heritage Area?,” National Park Service, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/what-is-a-national-heritage-area.htm>.

⁶⁵ “Ohio and Erie Canalway National Heritage Area,” Ohio and Erie Canalway, 2020, <https://www.ohioanderiecanalway.com>.

⁶⁶ “About the National Aviation Heritage Area,” National Aviation Heritage Alliance, 2020, <https://visitnaha.com/about/>; Jim Kolbe, “Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2005,” Pub. L. No. 108–447, § 16 USC 461 note (2004), Division J, Title V; National Aviation Heritage Alliance, “NAHA General Management Plan Executive Summary,” 2.

⁶⁷ Kolbe, Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2005; West Virginia, “NAHA Brochure,” National Aviation Heritage Alliance, n.d., https://visitnaha.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/NAHA-brochure_.pdf; National Park Service, “Basic Information,” National Aviation Heritage Area, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/avia/planyourvisit/basicinfo.htm>.

“approximately 1.1 million visitors enter the National Aviation Heritage Area and visit at least one partner site.” NAHA further “estimated that economic impact of these visitors ranges from \$30–\$38 million annually.”⁶⁸

Upon the creation of the National Aviation Heritage Area, Congress designated NAHA, then known as the Aviation Heritage Foundation, as its management entity. The Aviation Heritage Foundation grew out of the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission (DAHC), which Congress created as part of the original legislation establishing Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. The DAHC was intended to preserve and interpret Miami Valley aviation sites outside of the boundaries of the park until January 1, 2004, when Congress mandated its dissolution.⁶⁹ During its tenure, in 2002, the DAHC commissioned the “NAHA Concept Study” to explore the idea of creating a national heritage area. The study identified more than three hundred aviation sites in Ohio.⁷⁰ When the DAHC disbanded, the Aviation Heritage Foundation (AHF) formed to take its place, incorporating as a non-profit organization in 2002.⁷¹ Like the DAHC, the AHF intended to oversee the preservation and collaboration of aviation sites throughout the Miami Valley, functioning as an umbrella organization to coordinate the various goals and plans of its partner organizations in order to create a unified visitor experience.⁷²

The AHF created a five-year strategic plan in 2004 and updated it in 2005, following the creation of the heritage area. Building on that plan, the AHF drafted a general management plan (GMP), as mandated by Congress, in 2008. The GMP was intended to guide the heritage area beyond the strategic plan and increase opportunities for federal funding. It included 130 sites in the Dayton area and 20 sites outside of the region that were “historically relevant” to the national heritage area’s theme. The GMP included an interpretive strategy for the entire area, designed to “coordinate and enhance” the existing plans of partner sites, rather than replace them. The plan also reiterated the AHF’s goals moving forward, as first stated in the strategic plan. These included “Create a Culture of Cooperation,” “Brand and Market the Dayton Region,” “Leverage Funding,” and “Support Aviation History and Heritage Education and Resources.”⁷³ The AHF sought to bring groups together to make the Dayton area “THE global center of aviation heritage,” encourage economic growth, and

⁶⁸ National Aviation Heritage Alliance, “NAHA General Management Plan Executive Summary,” 22.

⁶⁹ National Aviation Heritage Alliance, 2. Public Law 102-419: To establish the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

⁷⁰ National Aviation Heritage Alliance, 21.

⁷¹ Strategic Leadership Associates Inc, “Aviation Heritage Foundation 2012: Strategic Plan, Volume 1” (Aviation Heritage Foundation, October 9, 2007), Vertical File: NAHA, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁷² National Aviation Heritage Alliance, “General Management Plan” (Dayton: Aviation Heritage Foundation, May 2008), 69.

⁷³ National Aviation Heritage Alliance, “NAHA General Management Plan Executive Summary,” 5–6, 21; National Aviation Heritage Alliance, “General Management Plan,” 69–70.

foster the “next generation” of innovators and leaders.⁷⁴ Throughout the drafting process, the public had the opportunity to comment on the organization’s future plans. The public generally responded favorably to plans for the heritage area and the organization.⁷⁵ In 2008, AHF began doing business as the National Aviation Heritage Alliance, although it retains the Aviation Heritage Foundation as its legal name.⁷⁶

NAHA has always been a collaborative effort. The original founding partners of the alliance included Aviation Trail, Inc., Dayton History, Dayton-Montgomery County Convention and Visitors Bureau, First to Fly Inc., Greene County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Greene County Historical Society, the National Aviation Hall of Fame, the Ohio Historical Society (now the Ohio History Connection), the US Air Force Museum Foundation, the US Air Force, the US Air and Trade Show, WACO Historical Society, Wright “B” Flyer Inc., and the Wright Brothers Family Foundation. Each organization has a trustee on the NAHA Board of Directors, as mandated by the organization’s bylaws. NAHA has additional at-large members on the board, including representatives from Air Camp, the Neil Armstrong Air and Space Museum, Grimes Historic Field, Woodland Cemetery, Vectren Dayton Air Show (now CenterPoint Energy), and Wright Image Group. The alliance also partners with other organizations such as the Champaign Aviation Museum and Wright State University Special Collections and Archives Library, though these groups do not have trustees on the organization’s board.⁷⁷ NAHA also designates associate partners, which have a “direct interest in the work and the outcome” of the alliance; however, they are not directly involved in the organization’s work. The Alliance of National Heritage Areas, the Ohio Department of Travel and Tourism, and several chambers of commerce within the heritage area are associate partners.⁷⁸ In addition to the board, NAHA has an executive director to execute the organization’s goals. This position was originally held by Tony Sculimbrene, who had previously served in the same position for NAHA’s predecessor organization, the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission. Mackensie Wittmer is now NAHA’s executive director.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ National Aviation Heritage Alliance, “NAHA General Management Plan Executive Summary,” 6, emphasis in the original.

⁷⁵ For a more detailed look at the public response to the general management plan, see appendix M.A: Public Input in the NAHA General Management Plan Process and appendix M.B: Public Comments, National Aviation Heritage Alliance, “General Management Plan.”

⁷⁶ Ohio Secretary of State, “Trade Name Filing,” February 19, 2008.

⁷⁷ National Aviation Heritage Alliance, “General Management Plan,” 114; Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was a founding partner of NAHA, though it does not have a trustee on the board. The superintendent serves as an ex-officio member; see “About the National Aviation Heritage Area.”

⁷⁸ “About the National Aviation Heritage Area”; National Aviation Heritage Alliance, “NAHA General Management Plan Executive Summary,” 9.

⁷⁹ Strategic Leadership Associates Inc, “Aviation Heritage Foundation 2012: Strategic Plan, Volume 1,” 8; Tony Sculimbrene, Oral History, interview by Edward J. Roach, August 24, 2006, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

Because both Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP and the National Aviation Heritage Area are designated NPS areas, the park and NAHA have a close working relationship. After the creation of the heritage area, the AHF and the NPS signed a cooperative agreement outlining their obligations to each other. The first agreement extended from its signing in 2005 to 2019; in 2019, the agreement was renewed. Staff at the national historical park offer technical support on the preservation and interpretation of heritage area sites, and NAHA includes the park, as a member of the heritage area, in its marketing.⁸⁰ As an example of the organizations' collaborative relationship, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Resource Manager Ann Honious led a long-range interpretive planning process for NAHA. Meanwhile, NAHA raised money throughout the 2010s to purchase and preserve the Wright Company factory buildings, with the intention of giving or selling them to the park (though as of 2022 this money has not yet been spent for that purpose). NAHA coordinates the various aviation entities, facilitating the park's collaboration with each group. In turn, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP provides office space for NAHA at 26 South Williams Street, within the park's core parcel.⁸¹

Informal Partners

Wright Dunbar, Inc.

Plans for an organization to oversee efforts to improve the Wright-Dunbar neighborhood and encourage economic development began in the mid-1990s. The first superintendent of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, William Gibson, used federal funds to partner with the National Trust for Historic Preservation's National Main Street Program to assess revitalizing the area surrounding the core parcel. The National Main Street Program began in 1980 with the goal of rehabilitating downtown areas while "celebrating their historic character." It utilized a four-pronged approach of organization, economic restructuring, design and physical infrastructure, and promotion and marketing to improve central urban areas.⁸²

⁸⁰ National Park Service, "Cooperative Agreement P19AC00361 between the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service and National Aviation Heritage Alliance," July 12, 2019, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Staff Records.

⁸¹ National Aviation Heritage Alliance, "General Management Plan," 253–301; Barrie Barber, "Wright 'B' Flyer Replica Gets Boost," *Dayton Daily News*, August 26, 2014, Vertical File: Wright B Flyer, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Ron Rollins, "Wright Co. Factory Site May Have High-Flying Future," *Dayton Daily News*, June 29, 2014, Vertical File: NAHA—Wright Factory, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁸² Sculimbrene, Oral History, 10–11. In 2013, the National Main Street Center became an independent subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation; see "About Us, Main Street America," Main Street America, 2021, <https://www.mainstreet.org/aboutus>. Sculimbrene, Oral History, 10–11.

Representatives from the National Main Street Center visited Dayton in November 1996, in order to assess the appropriateness of “the Main Street approach” for the Wright-Dunbar neighborhood. The team met with Jerry Sharkey in his capacity as chair of the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission, Park Superintendent Gibson, and Jennifer Sadler-Thomas from the 2003 Fund Committee. The Main Street representatives found the area ripe for economic development and recommended strategies for revitalizing the neighborhood through the Main Street program and heritage tourism. Their recommendations called for a “single vision,” with coordination between the involved organizations.⁸³

With community development block grants from the city of Dayton and \$60,000 from the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission, the city sought to hire a manager to oversee the Main Street program in West Dayton. The manager would provide the “single vision” referred to in the Main Street report, as well as oversee the creation of a nonprofit organization to guide development in the area. Tony Sculimbrene, executive director of the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission, proposed that the Main Street program become part of the commission. Judge Walter Rice, as one of the proponents for the program and chair of the commission, rejected the idea. Instead, the program operated separately from both the 2003 Fund Committee and the DAHC, despite an overlap in goals, board members, and volunteers. In 1998, the city of Dayton loaned employee Goodloe Gillispie to the Main Street Program as its manager. The following year, Gillispie, city commissioner Idoth “Bootsie” Neal, Dr. David Ponitz, and Rice submitted incorporation papers for The Main Street program Inc. The Ohio Secretary of State approved the organization in March 2000. In 2002, it adopted the name Wright Dunbar, Inc. (WDI), and in 2005, Bootsie Neal became executive director, a position she held until 2014.⁸⁴

⁸³ Matthew Wagner, “Report on the Assessment Wright/Dunbar Commercial District” (National Main Street Center, November 1996), 3–4, 5–6, 9, Project Plans and Interpretive Files, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁸⁴ Derek Ali, “Business District Seeks Coordinator—Post Will Focus on West Third Commercial Activities,” *Dayton Daily News*, November 27, 1997; Derek Ali, “Preserving the Past—Revitalization Vital for Wright Dunbar District,” *Dayton Daily News*, May 17, 1998; Sculimbrene, Oral History, 11–12, 17–18; “Articles of Incorporation for the Main Street Program,” March 15, 2000, Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Sean Strader, “Wright-Dunbar Inc. Receives Accreditation—Recognized for Historic Preservation,” *Dayton Daily News*, July 20, 2003; “Executive Committee Meeting Minutes” (Wright Dunbar, Inc., February 15, 2005), Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Bonnie Meibers, “First Black Woman Dayton City Commissioner Bootsie Neal Dies,” *Dayton Daily News*, January 24, 2021, <https://www.daytondailynews.com/news/first-black-woman-dayton-city-commissioner-bootsie-neal-dies/4QP6ZYMAZREGPUM7ND76FTT3M>.



Wright Dunbar, Inc. executive director Bootsie Neal poses with Vice President Joseph Biden at the 2012 White House Holiday Party. Image: Representative Mike Turner.

The vision for WDI situated Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP as its “anchor.” The goal of the organization was to improve the area by rehabilitating buildings, building attractive streetscapes, and creating a commercial district that served the local community. In its first years of existence, WDI bought various buildings in the area, including the fifth Wright cycle shop site, the “Midget Theater” [sic], the Pekin Theater, the H and H building, and the fish market. Once WDI owned the properties, they funded construction to stabilize the structures, restore the exteriors, and prepare the interiors for tenants.⁸⁵ WDI also fought to save buildings from city orders for demolition and encouraged local businesses to relocate to the area by providing grants to renovate interior spaces. The group improved

⁸⁵ “Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes” (Wright Dunbar, Inc., July 25, 2005), Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Sculimbrenne, Oral History, 22–25; “2003-2007 Capital Work Plan—West Third St. Historic District (Proposed)” (Wright Dunbar, Inc., n.d.), 2, Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library. In 2016, WDI agreed to sell the fish market and Pekin Theater to Aviation Trail, Inc. Cornelious Frolik, “West Third Apartments Considered,” *Dayton Daily News*, June 25, 2016, Vertical File: Wright-Dunbar, Inc., Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

the appearance of the neighborhood by purchasing awnings for local businesses and providing planters, and in 2004, WDI, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, and the Greater Dayton Regional Transit Authority collaborated to build three new parking lots.⁸⁶

This robust pace of neighborhood improvement was made possible by \$2 million in funding from the Mathile Fund that WDI received in 2002. These funds allowed the group to hire staff and fund its operations for the next four years. WDI also participated in the biannual Urban Nights in Downtown Dayton, along with the park, to draw locals into the area with music, food, art, and car shows.⁸⁷ In the words of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's management assistant Nicholas Georgeff:

They had an executive director; they had an administrative secretary that really kind of ran things. And then they had an office staff of three other individuals. This was all full-time workers, not counting their part-time or volunteer staff that they had. And so, they were able to do a lot of great and wonderful things in the area. . . . However, as time went on, unfortunately, the grant opportunities. . . . It seemed that all that, like, virtually dried up overnight. And Wright-Dunbar, Inc. became a casualty of that, for funding. So, while they went from a very large staff that could do many things, today, they really are down to, unfortunately, an office manager with a volunteer board that's aging out. And so, while they're still effective and they own property today, Wright-Dunbar, Inc. is not in a position where they were fifteen years ago. And that's unfortunate, because. . . there was a lot of passion there.⁸⁸

WDI remains a neighborhood advocate and recently collaborated with Wright State University to renovate neighborhood buildings into university mental health centers, as part of the Ellis-Wright-Dunbar Neighborhood Plan. WDI has also stated its intention to convert the Marietta Flats building at 1146 W. Third Street into housing, but as of 2022 this has not yet happened.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ "Group Tries to Save Building Facade," *Dayton Daily News*, December 9, 2004, Vertical File: Wright-Dunbar, Inc., Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; "Wright Dunbar, Inc.: A New Day," Annual Report, September 2005, Vertical File: Wright-Dunbar, Inc., Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Jaelyn Giovis, "Parking Planned for Wright Dunbar—Project to Build Three Lots Will Cost \$1.2 Million," *Dayton Daily News*, October 18, 2004.

⁸⁷ Giovis, "Parking Planned for Wright Dunbar—Project to Build Three Lots Will Cost \$1.2 Million"; "Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes"; Jim Bebbington, "Mathile Funds Gives \$5M to Local Projects—Hospital, DCDC, Wright-Dunbar Received Grants," *Dayton Daily News*, November 26, 2002; Ken Mosier, "Get in the Mix—From Food and Fun to Art and Lofts, Urban Nights Showcases Downtown," *Dayton Daily News*, April 26, 2006; "Motor News Around Dayton," *Dayton Daily News*, April 29, 2006.

⁸⁸ Nicholas Georgeff, Oral History I, interview by Susan Ferentinos, November 4, 2021, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁸⁹ Laura Englehart, "Wright-Dunbar Project Gains Steam," *Dayton Business Journal*, January 13, 2012, Vertical File: Wright-Dunbar, Inc., Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Frolik, "West Third Apartments Considered"; Mackensie Wittmer-Blake, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

Wright State University Special Collections

Efforts to establish a state-funded university campus in Dayton began in 1961. Originally conceived of as a joint branch campus of The Ohio State University and Miami University of Ohio, the campus opened in 1964 adjacent to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, on land that had previously been part of the base. In 1967, the campus transitioned to a freestanding, accredited institution, Wright State University.⁹⁰

The university's library is named in honor of Paul Laurence Dunbar, and the special collections department is housed within this building. This department has extensive holdings on the Wright brothers and the history of aviation, particularly as it relates to the city of Dayton. Wright State University's collections include those Wright family records that were not donated to the Library of Congress, a replica of the 1903 Wright Flyer (the first to achieve flight), and selections from the Wright brothers' personal library of published technical materials. In addition, the university holds well over a hundred other archival collections related to the history of aviation, including the records of Aviation Trail, Inc., Brad Tillson and his work on the 2003 Centennial of Flight, and the early-twentieth-century Wright Memorial Commission.⁹¹

The richness of Wright State University's archival holdings has contributed significantly to Dayton as a center of aviation heritage. It has also created an ample trove of primary source material on the history of aviation for staff at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP to access within an easy drive of park headquarters.

⁹⁰ Wright State University Libraries, "Campus History," Wright State University, accessed November 8, 2021, <https://libraries.wright.edu/special/history>.

⁹¹ Wright State University Libraries, "Collection Guides: Aviation," Wright State University, accessed November 7, 2021, <https://libraries.wright.edu/special/collectionguides/subject/4>.



A replica Wright B Flyer, 2003. Image: Damon J. Moritz, US Navy, via Wikimedia Commons.

Wright “B” Flyer Inc.

The Wright B Flyer was the world’s first mass-produced airplane, built by the Wright Company beginning in 1910. The only original surviving Wright B Flyer is in the collections of the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, though a highly modified example is on display at the National Museum of the US Air Force.⁹² Given the scarcity of original examples of this aircraft, a local group has dedicated itself to creating planes that appear historically accurate to the Wright B, while meeting twenty-first-century safety protocols.⁹³

Wright “B” Flyer Inc. is a nonprofit, volunteer organization founded by retired Lieutenant Commander John Warlick of the US Navy Reserve. It has built and owns several reproductions of the Wright brothers’ planes. The group’s “Brown Bird,” built in 1982, is a modern representation of the Wrights’ first mass-produced plane, the Wright B. The group offers flights in the reproduction aircraft out of the Dayton-Wright Brothers

⁹² National Park Service, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan,” 52; Edward J. Roach, *The Wright Company: From Invention to Industry*, electronic resource (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014), 92–94; Gaffney, *Dayton Flight Factory*, 97.

⁹³ Bob Petersen, Edward Roach, and Mackensie Wittmer-Blake, Comments on the Second Draft of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted via email to Susan Ferentinos, February 15, 2022.

Airport and ships the plane to air events across the globe. In 2021, Wright “B” Flyer Inc. debuted a newer look-alike version of the Wright B, known as the new Wright B Flyer. The organization has a museum in their hanger at the airport, which includes their third look-alike plane, the Valentine Wright Model B, originally built for the television movie *The Winds of Kitty Hawk*.⁹⁴

In 2001, Wright “B” Flyer Inc. purchased the Valentine plane from the original creators, Nancy and Tom Valentine of Burbank, California, with funds from the Greene County Commission, the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission, and Inventing Flight. Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP ranger Bob Petersen recalls that the original plan was for the plane to be donated to the national historical park, but because the NPS did not have a place to store the plane at the time, Wright “B” Flyer Inc. took possession of the plane. That same year, 2001, the organization signed a ten-year memorandum of understanding with Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP agreeing to a static display of the Valentine Flyer at Huffman Prairie Flying Field from May through October each year. The US Air Force agreed to build a facility adjacent to the flying field to house the plane. During the remaining months of the year, Wright “B” Flyer Inc. would store the plane in its museum at the airport. While at Huffman Prairie Flying Field, the park was to provide staff to assist with interpretation.⁹⁵

This memorandum of understanding was not renewed upon its expiration in 2011, and the replica flyers are no longer regularly interpreted at Huffman Prairie, despite the 2008 construction of a storage facility to house the Valentine Flyer. Staff reductions within the NPS made it difficult to provide the staffing Wright “B” Flyer Inc. felt was necessary to display the flyer, and so this look-alike flyer is no longer a regular part of NPS interpretation at Huffman Prairie Flying Field.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Inventing Flight, “News Release: Inventing Flight Honors John Warlick at Annual Meeting,” November 26, 2001, Vertical File: Wright B Flyer, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Barber, “Wright ‘B’ Flyer Replica Gets Boost”; Wright “B” Flyer Inc., “About Us,” 2020, <http://www.wright-b-flyer.org/about-us/>; Eric Schwartzberg, “New Wright Brothers Lookalike Airplane Tested Locally before Soaring Worldwide,” *Dayton Daily News*, October 7, 2021; Edward Roach, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

⁹⁵ Timothy R. Gaffney, “Flyer Replica Coming to Huffman Prairie,” *Dayton Daily News*, August 12, 2001, Vertical File: Wright B Flyer, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Bob Petersen, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022; “Memorandum of Understanding between the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park and Wright ‘B’ Flyer, Inc.,” August 7, 2001, Vertical File: Wright B Flyer, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁹⁶ Edward Roach, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

Conclusion

Building and managing as many park partnerships as Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP is no small feat, and in fact, this has been one of the ongoing, distinctive characteristics of this national park unit. Partnerships have also been one of the park's strengths, as the first general management plan predicted over twenty years ago: "The strength of the new park will be the cooperative relationship of the legislated partners plus other key entities."⁹⁷ Operating with a small staff and a small NPS budget in an underresourced city, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP has leveraged its partnerships and alliances to support a web of aviation heritage facilities throughout the region, through its agency's expertise, systems, and oversight. In turn, the partners have advocated on behalf of the park, spread word about it through their own marketing and branding, and assisted the NPS in navigating a local landscape. The result is truly noteworthy, as demonstrated by a 2002 journal article by Ronald W. Johnson that used Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP as one of three case studies exemplifying successful partnerships. In the words of Johnson: "When this urban park's administrative history is eventually written, the record will credit a diverse group of public- and private-sector individuals and organizations. Friends of Dayton aviation (both paid and volunteer) have spent countless hours to get the new park fully operational and to implement community improvements in the Wright Brothers' West Dayton neighborhood."⁹⁸

⁹⁷ National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan," 23.

⁹⁸ Ronald W. Johnson, "The Success of Planning Partnerships: Three National Park Service Case Studies," *George Wright Forum* 19, no. 1 (2002): 79–91, quotation from 87.

Commemorating a Century of Flight

The Wright brothers' first flight in 1903 lasted only twelve seconds and covered a mere 120 feet. However, it did not take long for Americans to recognize the truly remarkable accomplishment of the two brothers from Ohio. Only twenty-four years after Orville left the ground, the US government had marked the site as a national memorial. It would not be the last effort to honor the brothers. The Wrights' subsequent flights back home in Dayton quickly became a source of civic pride. Nationally, the Wright brothers' invention became a symbol of American superiority, coming as it did at the height of US efforts to expand its influence around the globe.

This chapter documents the various efforts around the United States to commemorate the Wright brothers and the invention of flight, culminating with the 2003 Centennial of Flight. Beginning with the memorial marking the first flight at Kill Devil Hills in North Carolina and ending with the creation of the National Aviation Heritage Area in the Miami Valley of Ohio, this chapter shows the numerous efforts Americans have taken to preserve and commemorate the incredible story of the Wright brothers and powered flight.

In Dayton, most of the efforts to memorialize and preserve the history of the Wright brothers now reside within the boundaries of Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park (NHP), and as such, their creation and management are discussed in Chapter 8 of this study, which focuses on the park's cultural resources. There, readers will find information about the Wright Cycle Company building, the Hoover Block, Huffman Prairie Flying Field, the Paul Laurence Dunbar House, the John S. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers National Museum, the 1905 Wright Flyer, Hawthorn Hill, and the Wright Company factory. The history of other Dayton efforts to commemorate the Wright brothers—Aviation Trail, Inc., the National Aviation Heritage Alliance, the National Museum of the United States Air Force, and the local Wright Brothers Memorial—are discussed in Chapter 5, "Park Partners."

Wright Brothers Commemoration before Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP

Wright Brothers National Memorial, Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina

The United States created its first national park unit dedicated to the invention of flight in 1927, with the establishment of the Wright Brothers National Memorial. This unit of the National Park Service (NPS) is located in Kill Devil Hills, on the Outer Banks of North Carolina, the site of the Wright brothers' early experimentation with flight and their first successful effort on December 17, 1903. The establishment of a memorial to an event that had occurred less than twenty-five years before was unusual—at least by twenty-first-century NPS policy—and it was made all the more unusual by the fact that Orville Wright was still alive and working.¹

Nevertheless, as Andrew Hewes, author of the national memorial's administrative history, points out, by the mid-1920s the revolutionary changes enabled by powered flight were already becoming evident. Airplanes had been used effectively in war, as demonstrated by World War I; they had increased the efficiency of communications through the establishment of air mail; and they were promising to bring the world in closer contact, as aviators began to cross oceans. Charles Lindbergh, in fact, accomplished the first transatlantic solo flight the same year the Wright Brothers National Memorial was established. Hewes also argues that the 1920s was an era of American economic and military dominance on the world stage, and the Wright Brothers National Memorial served as a fitting symbol of US ingenuity and success.²

Greenfield Village, Dearborn, Michigan

Industrialist Henry Ford engineered another early effort to memorialize the Wright brothers when he chose to include the early Wright family home and the Wright brothers' last cycle shop in his open-air history museum in Dearborn, Michigan. Ford's outdoor

¹ Andrew M. Hewes, "Wright Brothers National Memorial: An Administrative History" (Washington, DC: Division of History, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service, US Department of the Interior, 1967), 5–12. Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Historian Edward Roach points out that by 1927, Orville was largely "working" in name only; his major inventions had all already occurred. See Edward Roach, Comments to Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022. Nevertheless, the point is still valid: in 1927, the federal government did not necessarily know that Orville Wright's full historical significance had been achieved, and still it designated a national park unit to him and his brother, a move that in 2022 seems extraordinary.

² Hewes, 1–4.

museum, known as Greenfield Village, assembled historic buildings from all over the United States (and occasionally Europe) to present his ideal vision of the American past, one that emphasized individualism and innovation as distinctly American characteristics.³

Ford began assembling his village in the 1920s, and it had already been open to the public for a number of years before he acquired the buildings associated with the Wright brothers. Negotiations for Ford to acquire the buildings began at the end of 1935, initiated by a group of pre–World War I aviators, known as the Early Birds, and the publisher of the *Detroit News*, William E. Scripps. These parties identified Greenfield Village as the most appropriate place to ensure that iconic buildings related to the invention of flight were preserved. Apparently, Ford agreed; in 1936, he completed the purchase of the Wright family home at 7 Hawthorn Street and the Wright Cycle Shop at 1127 West Third Street in Dayton. Although the Wright brothers had operated their print and bicycle shops in multiple locations, the location that Ford purchased was the place where Orville and Wilbur had made the greatest advances in the invention of flight.⁴

At the time of Ford’s purchase of the Wright family home on Hawthorn Street, Orville Wright has been living in his “success mansion” for over twenty years. When the family moved to this much larger house, in 1914, Orville’s father Milton gifted their former home to his daughter Katharine, who in turn rented it to a domestic worker of the Wrights, Lottie Jones. (Katharine moved with her father and Orville to Hawthorn Hill.) Jones, an African American woman, had worked as a laundress for the Wright family since 1893, and continued to perform domestic work for the family at their new location until 1942, when she grew too elderly to work. From that point until her death the following year, Orville paid her a pension for her years of service to the family.⁵

Ten years after the Wrights moved to Hawthorn Hill, Katharine sold the home to Jones and her husband Luther for \$4,000. However, when Ford expressed interest in buying the Hawthorn Street home, Orville “facilitated” the sale of the home from Jones to Ford. Given the power differential between millionaires Orville and Ford on the one hand, and African American washerwoman Jones on the other, that “facilitation” may well have seemed

³ Ann Honious, *What Dreams We Have: The Wright Brothers and Their Hometown of Dayton, Ohio* (Fort Washington, PA: Eastern National, 2003), 220; for an exploration of Greenfield Village’s representation of the past, see Jessie Swigger, “*History Is Bunk*”: *Assembling the Past at Henry Ford’s Greenfield Village* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014); the Wright Brothers’ buildings are specifically discussed on pages 62–63.

⁴ Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 220; Aviation Trail, Inc., “Proposed Development Plan for the Wright Brothers Inner West Enterprise Zone (Draft)” (Dayton, OH: Aviation Trail Inc, March 1982), 8–9, folder: ATI Reports, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections; Elizabeth Fraterrigo et al., *From Pasture to Runway: Huffman Prairie Flying Field, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Cultural Landscape Report, Landscape Implementation Plan, Interpretation Plan* (Omaha: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2002); Timothy R. Gaffney, *The Dayton Flight Factory: The Wright Brothers and the Birth of Aviation* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2014), 31.

⁵ Sarah H. Heald, “Hawthorn Hill: A Furnishings History and Recommended Plan” (Harpers Ferry, WV: Harpers Ferry Center, National Park Service, 2010), 30–35, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/daav/hawthorn_hill_hfr.pdf.

like intimidation to Jones, who quite likely understood Orville (still her employer) as pressuring her to give up her home. The fact that she sold the home to Ford for \$4,100, a mere \$100 more than she had paid for it twelve years earlier, further supports this possibility.⁶

Ford had the Dayton buildings dismantled piece by piece and transported to Greenfield Village, where they were carefully reassembled by museum staff, who were overseen by Charlie Taylor, the Wright brothers' mechanic, in consultation with Orville Wright, then in his sixties, and other Wright family members. The dedication ceremony for the buildings in their new location was held on April 16, 1938, the seventy-first anniversary of Wilbur Wright's birth. Orville attended the ceremony, along with multiple other family members and an array of well-known aviators. Orville and Wilbur's grandnephew Wilkinson "Wick" Wright recalled in 1996 that Orville was quite pleased with the relocation of these buildings to Ford's museum.⁷

In the mid-1990s, the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission made inquiries about returning the Wright family home and cycle shop to Dayton. In response to a letter sent by commission chair Gerald "Jerry" Sharkey on October 8, 1996, Steven Hamp, president of the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, replied:

As you probably know, Henry Ford brought these historic buildings to Greenfield Village when no one in Dayton wanted them. Since that time, they have become key components in the educational programs presented in Greenfield Village, and we consider them national treasures that we could not consider giving up.

I certainly understand Dayton's interest in re-acquiring these buildings, but we can't be helpful.⁸

Thus these historically significant Wright buildings remain in Michigan.

⁶ Heald, 30–35, quotation from 74, n.98; Edward Roach, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

⁷ Aviation Trail, Inc., "Proposed Development Plan for the Wright Brothers Inner West Enterprise Zone (Draft)," 8–9; Elizabeth Fraterrigo et al., *From Pasture to Runway: Huffman Prairie Flying Field, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Cultural Landscape Report, Landscape Implementation Plan, Interpretation Plan* (Omaha: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2002), 45; Milton Wright, Milton Wright Oral History, interview by Ann Deines, September 26, 2000, 19–20, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Wilkinson Wright, Oral History I, interview by Ann Deines, May 11, 1996, 27, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Wilkinson Wright, Oral History II, interview by Ann Deines, September 5, 1996, 29–30, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; for more information on Greenfield Village's approach to relocating historic buildings, see Swigger, *History Is Bunk*, 41.

⁸ Steven K. Hamp, "Letter to Gerald Sharkey," November 12, 1996, folder 6, box 3, George Wedekind Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.



The Wright family home at 7 Hawthorn Street, Dayton, Ohio, prior to its move to Greenfield Village in 1936.
Image: Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-46699.

The Smithsonian Institution National Air and Space Museum, Washington DC

Along with the Wright family home and the Wright cycle shop, Henry Ford also expressed interest in purchasing the 1903 Wright Flyer, the original craft that achieved flight at Kitty Hawk. At the time Ford was acquiring the Wright buildings from Dayton, this plane was on loan to the Science Museum of London. However, Greenfield Village's landscape designer, Edward Cutler, was under the impression that Orville had promised Greenfield Village the flyer when it returned to the United States. Ford actually instructed Cutler to begin designing a building that would be located behind the other two Wright buildings and would eventually hold the 1903 Flyer. However, the idea of the flyer going to Michigan was either indeed the plan at one time and later changed or the result of a serious misunderstanding. The aircraft building at Greenfield Village was never built, and the Wrights'

original airplane ended up not in Dearborn, but at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, where it remains on permanent display at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum.⁹

Orville's choice of the Smithsonian as the recipient of the 1903 Flyer was surprising, because he had famously battled the institution for years in order to have the museum give credit to him and Wilbur as the inventors of powered flight, instead of Samuel Langley, who was Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's historic resource study provides the details of this dispute.¹⁰

Because of the disagreement with the Smithsonian, the 1903 Flyer spent many years in the United Kingdom, on loan to the Science Museum of London. In fact, at the time of Orville's death in 1948, his official will stipulated that the London museum was to permanently receive the flyer unless he requested its return during his lifetime. However, the executors of Orville's estate determined that five years earlier he had indeed requested the return of the aircraft after World War II was over, and an unsigned will by Orville indicated his intention to donate the flyer to the Smithsonian instead. Orville had never notified the Smithsonian of his change of heart, but apparently, he had been appeased by a 1942 article by Smithsonian Institution Secretary Charles Greeley Abbott crediting the Wright brothers with the invention. The Smithsonian exhibited the artifact beginning in December 1948, with a label that, at last, acknowledged the Wright brothers as the inventors of powered flight.¹¹

Wilbur Wright Birthplace, Hagerstown, Indiana

Wilbur Wright was born near Millville in Henry County, Indiana, on April 16, 1867. The following year, the family moved to Hartsville, Indiana. Though Wilbur only lived in the Millville house for one year, the site attracted early aviation enthusiasts, as evidenced by the log of visitors the farm's owners kept. In 1922, only ten years after Wilbur died from typhoid fever and five years before the memorial in North Carolina was established, the state of Indiana began to consider purchasing the home and surrounding farm. While the state debated making the purchase, local groups stepped in. Phi Delta Kappa fraternity created a memorial in honor of Wilbur at Henry County Memorial Park in 1923. The memorial was a tablet on a large boulder on the original site of the home. Orville, his

⁹ Swigger, *History Is Bunk*, 63.

¹⁰ Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 188–91, 198–200, appendix C; see also Tom Crouch, "Capable of Flight? The Wright-Smithsonian Controversy," electronic resource, in *Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum: An Autobiography*, ed. Michael J. Neufeld and Alex M. Spencer (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2010), 95–100; "History of the 1903 Wright Flyer," Wright Brothers Collection, Wright State University, n.d., <https://www.libraries.wright.edu/special/wrightbrothers/flyer/history>.

¹¹ Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 197–99; Crouch, "Capable of Flight?"; "Wright Brothers Collection: History of the 1903 Wright Flyer," Wright State University Special Collections Library, n.d., <https://www.libraries.wright.edu/special/wrightbrothers/flyer/history>.

sister Katharine, and his brother Lorin, along with Lorin's wife, Ivonette, attended the dedication. The tablet said simply, "Wilbur Wright—aeronaut and pioneer of heavier-than-air aviation."¹²

Phi Delta Kappa continued its efforts to preserve the site. In February 1929, the fraternity and the New Castle, Indiana, Chamber of Commerce held a banquet in honor of Wilbur. A week later, Indiana state legislators Herbert H. Evans and Charles M. Trowbridge introduced legislation to create the Wilbur Wright Memorial Commission, an organization that would oversee care of Wilbur's birth home. The Indiana General Assembly passed the bill, and Governor Ed Jackson signed it into law on March 7, 1929. After the passing of the bill, the commission purchased the home from Martin and Pearl Lundy for \$3,500.¹³

The state did little with its new purchase for decades. Over the next forty years, the state would show interest in the site in fits and starts, without any tangible commitment to preserve the home. In 1949, twenty years after the state bought the site, a small group formed a committee to save the house. Four years later, in 1953, the committee had grown to thirty-two members, with Colonel Roscoe Turner as its head. In celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of flight that year, the Indiana General Assembly passed a bill designating Wilbur's birthplace as a state memorial. Despite this designation, the house was demolished in 1954, meeting the same fate as several of the Wright bicycle shops and Orville's laboratory in Dayton.¹⁴

In 1955, the state of Indiana established yet another commission, this one named the Wilbur Wright Birthplace Commission. This time, it included \$10,000 in funding. Like its predecessors, it petered out without significant effort to preserve the site. In 1966, the state marked the site with a historical marker. The marker described Wilbur as the co-inventor of the airplane and included a brief timeline of his aviation inventions, ending with the first flight in Kitty Hawk.¹⁵ The commission formed once again in 1972 with \$50,000 in state funding to build a replica of the Wrights' Millville home. The state dedicated and opened the replica home in April 1974.¹⁶ In 1993, the state transferred ownership of the home to the Wilbur Wright Preservation Society, a private nonprofit. With \$250,000 from

¹² Wilbur Wright Birthplace Preservation Society, "Wright Family History," Wilbur Wright Birthplace Museum, accessed May 5, 2020, <https://wwbirthplace.com/wright-family-history>; Arthur George Renstrom, "Wilbur & Orville Wright: A Reissue of a Chronology Commemorating the Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of Orville Wright, August 19, 1871" (National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Office of External Relations, NASA History Office, NASA Headquarters, 2003), 42.

¹³ Renstrom, "Wilbur & Orville Wright"; Wilbur Wright Birthplace Preservation Society, "Wright Family History."

¹⁴ Wilbur Wright Birthplace Preservation Society, "Wright Family History."

¹⁵ Indiana Historical Bureau, "Birthplace of Wilbur Wright," Indiana Historical Bureau, accessed May 5, 2020, <https://www.in.gov/history/markers/134.htm>.

¹⁶ Wilbur Wright Birthplace Preservation Society, "Wright Family History."

the Henry County Food and Beverage Tax, the organization built a museum, which included a replica of the 1903 Wright Flyer. The preservation society continues to operate the site as of 2022.¹⁷

Wright Brothers Commemoration after Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP

Centennial of Flight Celebrations

Plans for the one hundredth anniversary of flight began in 1989. That year, Jerry Sharkey met with federal judge Walter Rice and *Dayton Daily News* publisher Brad Tillson to discuss ways to preserve and protect aviation sites around Dayton. They began working with representatives from the NPS and reaching out to Representative Tony Hall. Before it formally incorporated in October 1989 as the 2003 Fund Committee, the NPS referred to the group as the Dayton Task Force for the Wright Brothers. At its September meeting that year, the task force ratified the 2003 Fund Prospectus and accepted new members, including Hall.¹⁸ It was named the 2003 Fund Committee to demonstrate the group's commitment to commemorating the centennial of flight in 2003. The group incorporated with the stated purposes of preserving Wright brothers' history within Dayton, promoting economic development, assisting "with the planning, establishing and/or interpretation of historic and visitor attractions in preparation for the Dayton 1996 bicentennial, in preparation for the state of Ohio 2003 bicentennial, in *preparation for a world celebration of the 2003 centennial of powered flight* [emphasis added]," and raising money toward those ends.¹⁹ Eventually, the committee would count politicians, community leaders, NPS employees, and the Wright brothers' grandnephew, Wick Wright, among its members.

The initial goals for the 2003 celebration were broad. The 2003 Fund Committee planned to coordinate with other aviation-related entities, including the states of Ohio and North Carolina, the US Air Force, and the Smithsonian Institution. They envisioned "events and programs commemorating" flight, without offering specifics. Their final goal

¹⁷ Wilbur Wright Birthplace Preservation Society.

¹⁸ Jerry Sharkey, Oral History II, interview by Ann Deines, February 23, 1996, 44–47, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Brad Tillson, Oral History, interview by Ann Deines, February 29, 1996, 1–4. Walter Rice, Oral History, interview by Ann Deines, March 6, 1996, 3–5, 8. William Gibson to Associate Regional Director, Planning and Resources Preservation Midwest Region, "Wright Brothers Task Force Meeting #10," September 15, 1989, folder "Wright Brothers 2," MWR [Midwest Regional] Park Creation Files, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

¹⁹ 2003 Fund Committee, "Organization Chart," n.d., folder 1, box 1, Bill Gibson Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage Park Library. Emphasis added.

was to market the Century of Flight “to local, national, and world audiences.” Without having exhibits, attractions, or events planned, the 2003 Fund Committee already imagined an event worthy of international attention.²⁰

Plans for the 2003 celebration began ramping up in 1993. The 2003 Fund Committee created a subcommittee, co-chaired by Tillson and Carillon Historical Park Director Mary Mathews. A subcommittee, Century of Flight, oversaw preparations for the centennial celebration and began taking concrete steps to plan the events. The group identified likely partners in celebrating the centennial and began solidifying partnerships. Century of Flight collaborated with the US Air and Trade Show to plan a “Festival of Flight.” Likewise, they worked with Hall to establish a federal commission to oversee the celebrations. This would eventually become the Centennial of Flight Commission. Finally, the subcommittee agreed to collaborate with the First Flight Society of Kitty Hawk to commemorate the historic date.²¹

The 2003 Fund Committee also continued to work with the newly established Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP in order to develop its various sites in preparation for the centennial. Under the direction of first Superintendent William “Bill” Gibson, followed by Superintendent Lawrence “Larry” Blake, the park readied its various sites for the celebration. The goal was to create exhibits at Huffman Prairie Flying Field, the John W. Berry, Sr. Wright Aviation Center at Carillon Historical Park (now the John W. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers National Museum), and the Paul Laurence Dunbar House by the end of 2002. New NPS interpretive centers were planned for West Dayton and Wright Brothers Hill, overlooking Huffman Prairie, to be completed by the start of the celebrations. The committee also coordinated with the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission to rehabilitate the neighborhood surrounding the Wright Cycle Company and Hoover Block in West Dayton.²²

In 1997, Representative Hall introduced legislation to create a Centennial of Flight Commission. His bill, H.R. 2305, The Centennial of Flight Commemoration Act, proposed a twenty-one-member commission to oversee, encourage, and create anniversary events domestically and internationally. Modeled on the US Bicentennial Commission, the Centennial of Flight Commission was intended to “assist in the commemoration of the centennial of powered flight and the achievement of the Wright Brothers.” It would also commemorate subsequent developments in aviation. The bill had thirty-two cosponsors,

²⁰ 2003 Fund Committee, 7.

²¹ Steven King, “The 2003 Times,” March 30, 1994, Box 1, Folder 1, Bill Gibson Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage Park Library.

²² National Park Service, “Briefing Statement for Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park: Park Development and Preparation—2003 Centennial of Flight Celebration,” June 28, 2000, folder 32, box 1, Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park; Tony Sculimbren, Oral History, interview by Edward J. Roach, August 24, 2006, 7–11, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Stanley W. Kandebo, “Flight Centennial Activities Revving Up for 2003,” *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, July 23, 2001, folder 11, box 1, Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

all of whom were from North Carolina and Ohio. In addition to the Secretaries of the Interior, Defense, and Transportation and representatives from NASA and the Smithsonian Institution National Air and Space Museum, the proposed commission would include “twelve citizens of the United States” and twelve people appointed by the president. Of those appointed by the president, eight would be chosen based on their “qualifications or experience in the field of history, aerospace, science or industry,” or related fields. The chair of the First Flight Centennial Commission and the president of the First Flight Centennial Foundation, both of North Carolina, as well as the governor of Ohio and the chair of the 2003 Fund Committee, rounded out the commission. Despite the support of the North Carolina and Ohio delegations, the bill never made it out of committee.²³

The Senate version of the bill fared better. Introduced by Senator Jesse Helms and cosponsored by fellow North Carolina Senator Lauch Faircloth as well as Ohio Senators John Glenn and Mike DeWine, S. 1397 passed the Senate in 1998 after significant revision. The House passed the revised bill through a voice vote on October 14, 1998. After President Clinton signed it on November 13, 1998, the bill became Public Law 105-389.²⁴

The final version of the bill differed from the initial bill in several ways. For one, the commission only had six members, rather than twenty-one. The remaining six commissioners were the director of the Smithsonian’s National Air and Space Museum, the administrator of NASA, the chair of North Carolina’s First Flight Centennial Foundation, the chair of the 2003 Fund Committee, and the administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration. The sixth member of the commission was to be the head of an aviation society or similar organization from any state other than Ohio and North Carolina. The five other members would choose the remaining member. The other fifteen commissioners described in the original bill were relegated to a federal advisory board, a nineteen-member group composed of the initial Secretaries as well as eight US citizens. Of those citizens, one had to be selected by the members of Congress “whose districts encompass any part of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.” The interests of Ohio, and Dayton in particular, were well represented on the federal commission.²⁵

The bill clarified the duties of the commission. Rather than plan festivities, it would coordinate and publicize events planned by other organizations. It was not intended to “duplicate” the efforts of any organization of national prominence, including the 2003 Fund Committee. The NPS and its two park units related to aviation were presumably

²³ Centennial of Flight Commemoration Act, H.R. 2305, 105th Cong, 1st sess. (1997), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/house-bill/2305>. The Centennial of Flight Commission was also added to the National Air Transportation Improvement Act. Wendell H. Ford National Air Transportation System Improvement Act of 1998, H.R. 4057, 105th Congress, 2nd session (1998), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/house-bill/4057>.

²⁴ Centennial of Flight Commemoration Act, Pub. L. No. 105-389, 112 Stat. 3486 (1998), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/senate-bill/1397>.

²⁵ Helms, Centennial of Flight Commemoration Act.

considered organizations of national prominence as well. The commission could publicize their events but would not work with the parks to plan any celebrations. The final legislation does not mention the NPS.²⁶

The final version also changed the funding of the commission. The first version permitted the group to accept “donations, money, personal service, and historic materials.” After concerns that the commission would be in competition for funds with other aviation groups, the final bill prohibited the commission from accepting donations other than “personal services and historical materials relating to the implementation of its responsibilities.” To offset the lack of donations, the commission received \$2 million in appropriated funds each fiscal year of its operation, 1999–2004. The initial bill also had a provision allowing the 2003 Fund Committee and the First Flight Centennial Foundation to acquire licensing royalties that were not needed to offset the commission’s work. This was removed from the final bill. The funds would instead go to the US Department of the Treasury, and the licensing rights went to the National Air and Space Museum.²⁷

Once created, the commission got off to a rocky start. In May 1999, Senator DeWine introduced legislation to amend the group’s makeup. His bill clarified those eligible to serve on the commission, its duties, its use and ownership of a logo, and the wording on the commission’s ability to spend funds. The bill became law in October 1999.²⁸ The confusion over these sections of the bill delayed the group’s work. Then, while the bill made its way through Congress, the director of the National Air and Space Museum and acting chair of the commission, Donald D. Engen, died in a gliding accident in July 1999.²⁹ The acting director of the National Air and Space Museum took over Engen’s role as acting chair of the commission, and the group posted advertisements for both an executive director and the sixth seat on the commission. Decisions regarding both were moved to fiscal year 2000, leaving the group with only five members. Despite these stumbling blocks, the Centennial of Flight Commission moved ahead with creating a website and a logo.³⁰ They eventually decided on a 1903 Wright Flyer with a blue “‘Century Arc’ representing one hundred years of aerospace progress.” The arc ends with a blue “‘Vector to the Future’

²⁶ Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, “Centennial of Flight Commemoration Act: Report of the Committee on Governmental Affairs,” 105th Cong., 2d sess. (Washington, DC: United States Senate, August 25, 1998), 3.

²⁷ Helms, Centennial of Flight Commemoration Act, S. 1397, 105th Cong., 1st sess.; Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, “Centennial of Flight Commemoration Act: Report of the Committee on Governmental Affairs,” 5–6.

²⁸ Mike DeWine, “A Bill to Make Certain Technical and Other Corrections Relating to the Centennial of Flight Commemoration Act,” Pub. L. No. 106–68, 113 Stat. 981 (1999), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/106th-congress/senate-bill/1072?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22S+1072%22%5D%7D&s=2&r=1>.

²⁹ Martin Weil and Don Phillips, “Air and Space Museum Head Dies in Crash,” *Washington Post*, July 13, 1999, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/local/daily/july99/engen14.htm>.

³⁰ Centennial of Flight Commission, “Centennial of Flight Commission Report, Fiscal Year 1999,” April 21, 2000, <https://www.centennialofflight.net/about/1999NtlPlan/commissionReport1999.htm>. The commission’s reports as well as portions of their website are maintained by the American Aviation Historical Society.

denoting a sense of momentum and future direction.” As the commission’s annual report emphasized, their chosen logo was distinct from the Wright Flyer logo utilized by Wright State University and the NPS.³¹ The commission also settled on a slogan: Born of Dreams. Inspired by Freedom.



The official logo for the Centennial of Flight, from the federal First Flight Centennial Commission.
Image: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US-CentennialOfFlightCommission-Logo.svg>.

The commission was more active in 2000. It selected General J. R. “Jack” Daily, the new director of the air and space museum, as its chair and Thomas P. Poberezny of the Experimental Aircraft Association as its sixth member.³² As part of their duties outlined by Congress, the commission produced educational materials, a calendar of events, narrative histories of significant moments in aviation history, conferences, and an updated biography of the Wright brothers. The commission’s website, which debuted in July 2000, made these resources available to the public. The group also lobbied for the creation of a commemorative stamp. The commission’s national plan outlined the variety of organizations involved

³¹ Centennial of Flight Commission, “FY2000 Report to Congress,” November 1, 2000, <https://www.centennialofflight.net/about/annualrpt/toc.htm>.

³² Centennial of Flight Commission.

in commemorating the centennial of flight, as well as the wide array of commemorative activities. In addition to traditional museum exhibits, the commission oversaw the publication of new books and scholarly articles, international symposiums, school programs, lecture series, awards, an art contest, and a television program. While the commission created two educational posters and hired a researcher to write narrative essays for its website, its partners, including Inventing Flight (the successor to the 2003 Fund Committee), NASA, the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, and the First Flight Centennial Foundation, carried out the bulk of the programs. Most of the commission's outreach took the form of "promotional literature, visual exhibits, and visual media." Individual partners, including Inventing Flight, undertook their own campaigns as well.³³

With the planned activities for the centennial celebration, the commission estimated a large economic impact from the festivities. They projected over 1.6 million total visitors to their various events and accounted for both indirect and direct economic benefits. The commission's national plan estimated "every dollar spent by a tourist will generate from 40 cents to 80 cents of additional revenue." A large portion of this tourist money would be spent in Dayton. The commission projected Inventing Flight's main celebration would draw 600,000 visitors. The other scheduled events at the National Museum of the US Air Force were projected to add another 250,000 visitors. Inventing Flight's events and Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP would produce the largest economic benefit for Dayton. During 2002 and 2003, the commission estimated the impact from Inventing Flight alone to be \$110 to \$112 million. They expected Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's recurring impact to be \$11 to \$13 million, after accounting for projects completed in time for the celebration. The Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC, was also expected to see a recurring economic impact of over \$16 million. The total estimated economic impact of the centennial year was \$115.8 to \$117.8 million, with an additional \$28.3 to \$30.3 million annually after that.³⁴

The centennial celebration spanned the United States. The commission worked closely with partner groups across the country to commemorate the Wrights' historic flight. The celebrations kicked off on December 17, 2002, and included a full year of events, concluding in December 2003. The kick-off event took place at the National Air and Space Museum. Actor John Travolta emceed the ceremony, and the audience included such aviation dignitaries as John Glenn, Neil Armstrong, members of the Wright family, and representatives from the Tuskegee Airmen. The final calendar included 545 events, scheduled across the United States from Arizona to New York. The epicenter, however, was

³³ Centennial of Flight Commission, "National Plan For The Centennial Of Flight Commemoration," November 2001, <https://www.centennialofflight.net/about/2001NatlPlan/cover.htm>.

³⁴ Centennial of Flight Commission.

Dayton.³⁵ The 2003 Fund Committee worked hard to make it so. If Dayton were not the center, “the focus would be primarily, if not exclusively, on North Carolina,” overlooking Dayton’s extensive history. Especially for the 2003 Fund Committee, the Centennial of Flight celebration provided an opportunity to return Dayton to its rightful place at the center of aviation history.³⁶

The 2003 Fund Committee, under the new name of Inventing Flight, oversaw numerous Dayton events and activities over seventeen days in July. The events coincided with Ohio’s state bicentennial celebration, which opened additional sources of funding. Scheduled events included an expanded version of the annual Dayton Air Show, which drew crowds estimated at 150,000 people, and a hot air balloon launch and festival. Inventing Flight also organized a festival space, named Celebration Central, in downtown Dayton with four pavilions, an educational center, an aviation playground for children, and a parade. Inventing Flight coordinated with other area groups for the festivities. The Dayton Black Cultural Festival presented a Salute to the Tuskegee Airmen, while the National Museum of the US Air Force hosted the International Airship Meet. The American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics and the International Council of Aeronautical Sciences hosted the International Air and Space Symposium and Exposition at the Dayton Convention Center. Carillon Historical Park created the living history program “Time Flies” to be performed at their own site, Huffman Prairie Flying Field, the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center, and the Dunbar House.³⁷ On July 4, President George W. Bush spoke at the National Museum of the US Air Force to an audience of thirty thousand. Overall, an unofficial estimate counted 780,900 visitors to Dayton’s Centennial of Flight Celebration. Over twenty-two million people attended centennial events worldwide.³⁸

³⁵ Centennial of Flight Commission, “Final Report for The Centennial of Flight Commemoration,” April 2004, <https://www.centennialofflight.net/about/2004NtlPlan/cover.htm>; Stephen Kinzer, “Dayton Claims Its Airspace,” *New York Times*, June 22, 2003, sec. Travel, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/06/22/travel/dayton-claims-its-airspace.html>.

³⁶ Brad Tillson, Oral History, interview by Ed Roach, September 20, 2005, 8.

³⁷ Lawrence Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2003” (National Park Service, 2003), 1–2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

³⁸ Caleb Stephens and Brian Womack, “Inventing Flight Bleeds \$4M-Plus,” *Dayton Business Journal*, July 24, 2003, <https://www.bizjournals.com/dayton/stories/2003/07/21/daily40.html>. Centennial of Flight Commission, “National Plan For The Centennial Of Flight Commemoration.” Elina Blain, “Inventing Flight: The Centennial Celebration an Economic Impact Study on Tourism in Dayton, Ohio” (Dayton, Wright State University, 2004), 3. Centennial of Flight Commission, “Final Report for The Centennial of Flight Commemoration.”



Former pilot, astronaut, and US Senator from Ohio John Glenn speaks at an Inventing Flight event at the National Museum of the US Air Force in Dayton, 2003. Image: US Air Force, National Museum of the US Air Force collection, 140825-F-DW547-018.JPG.

Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was, of course, a large part of the celebration. The commission had recognized the importance of the park to the celebrations early on. In the commission's annual report to Congress in 2000, it recommended that "the Nation ensure that these important sites are ready to receive, and meet the high expectations of, the large numbers of visitors that are expected in conjunction with the centennial celebration." The commission also called for "continued organizational and financial support" for both Dayton's national historical park and the Wright Brothers National Memorial in North Carolina, so that both would be ready for the centennial.³⁹ The park's Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center, a new building overlooking the flying field, fully opened to

³⁹ Centennial of Flight Commission, "FY2000 Report to Congress."

the public in December 2002. The park's Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center, housing the welcome centers of both Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP and the Aviation Trail, opened on June 27, 2003, just in time for the local celebration the following month. In the months leading up to the celebration, Dayton-area organizations, local government, the 2003 Fund Committee/Inventing Flight, and the NPS hurried to finish renovating the areas surrounding significant Wright sites. The Wright Flyer III and surrounding exhibit spaces at Carillon Historical Park were restored, a new hangar opened at the air force museum, and Wright Brothers Hill received an update. The only project left unfinished was the restoration of the neighborhood surrounding the park's core parcel in West Dayton. Though progress had been made, burned-out buildings and other signs of decay were still apparent. Locals remained convinced that development, accelerated by the centennial, would continue after its conclusion. The celebration, they hoped, would have lasting economic benefits for the Dayton area.⁴⁰

According to historian Tom Crouch, the most lasting legacy of the Centennial of Flight celebration was the establishment of Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park. Though the park was authorized a decade before, "the approaching anniversary helped to build broad support for a new park that would preserve and interpret the West Dayton neighborhood and other local sites where the Wrights had lived and worked." The hard deadline of the Inventing Flight celebration, set for July 2003, provided the impetus to complete the visitor centers and renovations on an accelerated timeline.⁴¹ Brad Tillson concurred; the national park was "the greatest legacy of 2003."⁴²

Outside of its seventeen-day celebration in Dayton, Inventing Flight coordinated activities and exhibits for the entire year. The Dayton Art Institute created a traveling exhibit of Wright brothers' photography, which would make its way to Paris and North Carolina. The Dayton Philharmonic performed brand new pieces, and the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company debuted new routines, all "based on the theme of flight." Even the Aullwood Audubon Society of Dayton created a program based on birds' natural flight and organized field trips for students. Inventing Flight also oversaw the creation of precollegiate curricula to teach and inspire students.⁴³ For all of their efforts to promote Dayton, aviation history, and the Wright brothers, the US House of Representatives recognized Dayton and Inventing Flight's Centennial Celebration with a resolution in 2003.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Jim DeBrosse, "Flight Festival Foundations: Wright Sites," *Dayton Daily News*, April 18, 2003; Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2003," 3.

⁴¹ Centennial of Flight Commission, "Final Report for The Centennial of Flight Commemoration."

⁴² Tillson, Oral History, September 20, 2005, 8.

⁴³ Centennial of Flight Commission, "National Plan for the Centennial of Flight Commemoration."

⁴⁴ Honoring Dayton, Ohio, and Its Many Partners for Hosting "Inventing Flight: The Centennial Celebration," H. Con. Res. 162, 108th Cong., 1st sess. (2003), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2003-06-09/html/CREC-2003-06-09-pt1-PgH5050.htm>.

By all measures, the Centennial of Flight had been a success. A 2004 study found that the celebration produced somewhere between \$16.2 million, conservatively, and \$24.9 million in total direct spending. The indirect effects on the economy were, of course, even greater.⁴⁵ Beyond its economic impact, the centennial celebration achieved its other goals of increasing awareness of aviation history and laying a foundation for future aviation tourism.⁴⁶ The First Flight Centennial Commission's website counted hundreds of thousands of visitors, and millions of children had been reached through educational programs. When the commission disbanded in 2004, its members left knowing they had reached their goal.⁴⁷

Inventing Flight individually, however, was less successful. Despite the high number of overall attendees, they reported losses of over \$4 million.⁴⁸ The group had earned only \$1.2 million, instead of the projected \$3.5 million. Creditors eventually forgave Inventing Flight's debt, allowing them to break even.⁴⁹ In the aftermath of the event, other local groups criticized Inventing Flight's methods, arguing they did not do enough to help fund smaller groups' efforts. The complaint was so pervasive that Judge Walter Rice referred to it as "the latest popular fad of bashing Inventing Flight."⁵⁰ Money issues aside, Inventing Flight had successfully made Dayton the center of the Centennial of Flight celebrations and had drawn hundreds of thousands of tourists. In addition, Inventing Flight's mixed legacy would shape future efforts to preserve Dayton-area aviation history.

The National Aviation Heritage Area

Even before the Centennial of Flight celebration, local aviation enthusiasts worried about the fate of aviation sites after the centennial. By law, the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission (DAHC) and the Centennial of Flight Commission would both come to an end on January 1, 2004. Likewise, Inventing Flight was oriented around the centennial celebration and would disband the following year.⁵¹ The dissolution of these three groups almost simultaneously left Dayton's disparate aviation sites without a clear successor to oversee their preservation or collaboration between the various organizations, including

⁴⁵ Blain, "Inventing Flight: The Centennial Celebration an Economic Impact Study on Tourism in Dayton, Ohio," 35, 31.

⁴⁶ Goals from Blain, "Inventing Flight: The Centennial Celebration an Economic Impact Study on Tourism in Dayton, Ohio", quoted on pg. 1.

⁴⁷ Centennial of Flight Commission, "Final Report for the Centennial of Flight Commemoration."

⁴⁸ Stephens and Womack, "Inventing Flight Bleeds \$4M-Plus." Centennial of Flight Commission, "National Plan for the Centennial of Flight Commemoration." Blain, "Inventing Flight: The Centennial Celebration an Economic Impact Study on Tourism in Dayton, Ohio," 3.

⁴⁹ Jim DeBrosse, "Inventing Flight Breaks Even as Creditors Forgive \$3M Debt," *Dayton Daily News*, July 15, 2004.

⁵⁰ Timothy R. Gaffney, "Aviation Group to Have Expanded Board of Directors," *Dayton Daily News*, September 6, 2003.

⁵¹ Mei-Ling Hopgood, "Historical Designation Sought," *Dayton Daily News*, February 28, 2002.

the NPS. Anticipating this problem, members of both Inventing Flight and the DAHC, including Rice and Tillson, formed a new group, the Aviation Heritage Foundation. Conscious of the criticisms of Inventing Flight, however, they included members of local groups on their board.⁵² Incorporating in 2002, the new group described its purpose as promoting and protecting Ohio's aviation resources, as well as "marketing Dayton. . . and making [it] a tourist attraction."⁵³ Toward that goal, the foundation would work "to conserve, interpret, and develop the historical, cultural, natural, and recreational resources related to the industrial and cultural heritage of an aviation National Heritage Area for the educational and inspirational benefit of present and future generations."⁵⁴ Like the commissions and organizations that had come before, the foundation incorporated with a specific task in mind: to create a National Aviation Heritage Area.

The Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission shared this goal, advocating for a national heritage area before it disbanded. In the commission's view, the designation would "position the community for after the 2003 Inventing Flight" celebrations. It would also expand the area's aviation history beyond the Wright brothers.⁵⁵ In short, a National Aviation Heritage Area and its management would assume the responsibilities of the sunsetting Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission.

The creation of a National Aviation Heritage Area would provide Ohio with several benefits. For one, it would continue fostering national attention, which might otherwise wane in the wake of the centennial celebration. For another, the designation would create a "unifying theme for historic preservation and tourism." Most importantly, the designation would open access to \$10 million in federal money. The federal government would match funds raised by the Aviation Heritage Foundation (AHF) if the area received a national heritage area designation.⁵⁶

Once again, the Dayton community turned to their congressional representatives. In 2002, the AHF persuaded both Senator Mike DeWine and Representative David L. Hobson (R-OH-7) to introduce matching bills creating the National Aviation Heritage Area. Ohio's other senator, George V. Voinovich (R-OH), and fourteen of Ohio's eighteen representatives cosponsored the bill. However, the bill was never brought to a vote.⁵⁷ Hobson reintroduced the bill the following session, and the House passed it by voice vote in November 2003. DeWine also reintroduced the bill in the Senate, where it passed by

⁵² Gaffney, "Aviation Group to Have Expanded Board of Directors."

⁵³ Walter Rice, Oral History, interview by Ed Roach, May 10, 2006, 5.

⁵⁴ Ohio Secretary of State, "Initial Articles of Incorporation of Aviation Heritage Foundation, Inc.," August 8, 2002.

⁵⁵ Kelli Wynn, "National Aviation Heritage Label Sought," *Dayton Daily News*, May 23, 2002.

⁵⁶ Jim DeBrosse, "Flight Nonprofit Forms in Dayton," *Dayton Daily News*, August 17, 2003; Timothy R. Gaffney, "Aviation Area Is Expanding," *Dayton Daily News*, December 3, 2004.

⁵⁷ National Aviation Heritage Act, S. 2744, 107th Cong., 2d sess. (2002); National Aviation Heritage Act, H.R. 5148, 107th Cong. 2d sess. (2002).

unanimous consent in September 2004. Ultimately, the heritage area became attached to the Consolidated Appropriations Act. President George W. Bush officially created the National Aviation Heritage Area when he signed the act in December 2004.⁵⁸

The bill designated eight counties in Ohio as the core heritage area. In addition to Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP—which would be the center of the newly designated area—the heritage area recognized additional sites as significant to aviation history.⁵⁹ These included the Neil Armstrong Air and Space Museum in Wapakoneta, Ohio; Woodland Cemetery in Dayton, the final resting place of the Wrights; and WACO field in Troy, Ohio. As part of the bill, the AHF was named the management entity. Like the organizations before it, Congress tasked the AHF with organizing and overseeing a collaborative effort to promote and preserve aviation history. The AHF would create a management plan and work with other organizations to implement it. As always, the goal was preserving, restoring, and interpreting the existing aviation sites. The group had three years to design and present a plan for the area. Eventually, the group began doing business as the National Aviation Heritage Alliance (NAHA), although it retained the Aviation Heritage Foundation as its legal name.⁶⁰

The 2004 bill creating the National Aviation Heritage Area required an updated special resource study for the Wright Company factory buildings, outlining alternatives for the oversight of their preservation and maintenance. Accordingly, the NPS completed an environmental and boundary assessment for the factory buildings in 2006, and the factory was added to the park boundaries in 2009.⁶¹ The final stipulation of the bill ended funding for the heritage area after fifteen years.⁶² In December 2019, Congress extended the heritage area's funding through fiscal year 2022, and in February 2021 Representative Mike Turner (R-OH-10) introduced a bill that would reauthorize the National Aviation Heritage Area through fiscal year 2036.⁶³

⁵⁸ National Aviation Heritage Act, S. 180, 108th Cong. 2d sess. (2003); National Aviation Heritage Act,” H.R. 280, 108th Cong. 1st sess. (2003); Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2005, Pub. L. No. 108-447, 118 Stat. 2809 (2004).

⁵⁹ Rice, Oral History, May 10, 2006, 10. The bill designates Indiana to be included in the area; however, all of the sites included are in Ohio. Kolbe, Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2005.

⁶⁰ Kolbe, Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2005; “About the National Aviation Heritage Area,” National Aviation Heritage Alliance, 2020, <https://visitnaha.com/about/>; Mackensie Wittmer, “RE: DAAV Admin History Question,” email to Susan Ferentinos, May 19, 2022.

⁶¹ National Park Service, *The Wright Company Factory Boundary Assessment and Environmental Assessment* (Dayton, OH: US Department of the Interior, 2006). Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, Pub. L. No. 111-11. Stat. 991 (2009).

⁶² National Park Service; Kolbe, Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2005.

⁶³ Thomas Gnau, “Kettering Eyes \$2M Renewal of Business Park Site for Air Force Partnership,” *Dayton Daily News*, November 16, 2020; Mike Turner, “National Aviation Heritage Area Reauthorization Act, H.R. 956, 117th Cong., 1st Sess.” (n.d.), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/956>.

The National Aviation Heritage Area was not the first of its kind. Congress had created twenty-three other heritage areas by the time Hobson and DeWine introduced an aviation one. The Miami Valley, however, was especially well situated to become a heritage area. The creation of the national historical park, as well as the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission, in 1992 laid the foundation for the type of public-private partnership a heritage area created. Likewise, the mixed legacy of Inventing Flight served as a recent reminder of the importance of collaboration and communication among organizations. The heritage area designation was the next “natural step” that would fold in more organizations and sites than just Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP’s legislated partners, and offer them national status, without actually adding them to the national park. It also expanded the region’s significance beyond the Wright brothers by drawing attention to subsequent aviation pioneers.⁶⁴ The heritage area and the park remained separate. However, the heritage area was only possible because the park and the DAHC had already been created.

The US Tentative List of World Heritage Sites

In 2006, the NPS Office of International Affairs put out a call for nominations to the US Tentative List of World Heritage Sites, and management staff at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP decided to put forward four sites related to aviation history. World Heritage Sites are places recognized by the United Nations Educational, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as holding international cultural and/or natural significance. The US Tentative List of World Heritage Sites is a list of sites that likely qualify for designation as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The US tentative list is maintained by the federal government, and any US nominations to UNESCO come from this compilation.⁶⁵

Superintendent Larry Blake, Cultural Resource Manager Ann Honious, and Park Historian Edward Roach worked together to nominate the “Dayton Aviation Sites” to the tentative list. The nomination included the Wright Cycle Company building, Huffman Prairie Flying Field, the Wright Flyer III/Wright Hall, and Hawthorn Hill (not yet part of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP). The nomination was completed in 2008.⁶⁶ Roach remembered the nomination process as involving significant work with the US Air Force, the park’s partner at Huffman Prairie Flying Field:

⁶⁴ Tony Hall, “National Aviation Heritage Area, 107th Cong., 2nd Sess.,” *Congressional Record Daily Edition* 148, no. 98 (July 17, 2002): E1285; Lawrence Blake and Tony Sculimbrene, Oral History, January 24, 2008.

⁶⁵ Edward Roach, Oral History, interview by Susan Ferentinos, May 18, 2022, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park; National Park Service, “US World Heritage Tentative List,” International Cooperation (US National Park Service), July 30, 2019, https://www.nps.gov/subjects/internationalcooperation/revisted_tentative_list.htm.

⁶⁶ Lawrence Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2004–2007” (National Park Service, 2007), Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; John Nolan, “Local Aviation Sites Get Attention—Four Landmarks Nominated for Tentative US World Heritage List,” *Dayton Daily News*, January 24, 2008.

The Air Force. Oh boy! Hard to get the air force to agree to potentially have a site that is right beside the active runway at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base included on a list managed by a United Nations organization. All those paranoid fears about blue helmets coming in and doing something. So, there was a whole—and then, you know, that’s the air force. Their food chain is bureaucratic and high. And that had to go all the way up the food chain to some assistant secretary, deputy secretary, anyway, pretty high up into the Pentagon to get their approval so that Huffman Prairie could be on this nomination. And Huffman Prairie is probably the most important part of the nomination.⁶⁷

The Dayton Aviation Sites were added to the US Tentative List of World Heritage Sites in 2008 and are currently one of only eleven cultural entities on the list. Two other Ohio cultural sites are on the list as well: Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks and Serpent Mound.⁶⁸

Conclusion

The Wright brothers’ invention irrevocably changed the United States and the world. Fittingly, later generations have sought to memorialize the Wright brothers’ achievements by preserving the sites significant to their lives and work. Through dedicated individuals, local clubs, wealthy investors, state governments, the National Park Service, and federal legislation, Americans have ensured the commemoration of the Wright brothers’ testing sites, homes, and planes. The memorials have taken various forms: a monument in North Carolina, a plaque on a boulder in Indiana, transporting entire buildings to Michigan, and a federally designated National Aviation Heritage Area in Ohio. Celebrations have ranged from small dinners and dedication ceremonies to weeks-long events. For the one hundredth anniversary of the first flight, the entire country celebrated with airshows, educational programs, and new museums. The wide array of Wright brothers’ memorials and events commemorating their achievements speaks to their vast influence on America.

⁶⁷ Roach, Oral History.

⁶⁸ Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, “Management Team Meeting Minutes, January 24, 2008” (January 28, 2008), 2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Staff Records; National Park Service, “US World Heritage Tentative List.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

Park Management

By 2022, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park (NHP) had been overseen by four superintendents—William Gibson, Lawrence Blake, Dean Alexander, and Kendell Thompson. Thompson, the current superintendent, started in Dayton on a detail as acting superintendent in 2017 and stepped into the permanent position in 2018. The previous three superintendents each spent eight to ten years at the park, and it was each man’s last position in the National Park Service before retirement. The seasoned level of each superintendent selected to serve at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP suggests the complexity of managing this park unit, with its multiple partners and noncontiguous park boundaries.

This chapter looks at the management of this national historical park from the perspective of each superintendent, considering the major issues and achievements of each man’s time in Dayton, as well as their collaborations with other nearby national park units. A narrative of funding trends appears at the end of this chapter; year-by-year funding levels can be found in Appendix C. Major issues and the events at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP are mentioned in this chapter to provide a bird’s-eye view of park operations. However, most of these issues and events are discussed in greater detail in the chapters that follow, which are focused on cultural resource management, interpretation and education, and visitor services and outreach.

William Gibson, Superintendent 1993–1998

William “Bill” Gibson had already been with the National Park Service (NPS) for thirty years when he became the first superintendent of Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park in 1993. A native of Spotswood, New Jersey, with a background in forestry, he served in eight national park units over the course of his career, culminating with the assignment in Dayton. Prior to moving to Dayton, Gibson served as superintendent of

Hopewell Culture National Historical Park (NHP), previously Mound City Group National Monument, in Chillicothe, Ohio. Hopewell Culture NHP was Gibson's first superintendency, and he served there from 1988 until his transfer to Dayton.¹

By the time he became superintendent of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, Gibson had actually been involved with the idea of the park and with local stakeholders for quite some time. While superintendent at Hopewell Culture NHP, Gibson also served as Ohio state coordinator for the NPS. Some incarnation of state coordinators had been a feature of agency operations since the late 1960s. Implemented by NPS Director George B. Hartzog Jr., the state coordinator program assigned one NPS superintendent per state to represent the agency at the state and local levels, raising awareness about the agency and serving as a liaison between the State Historic Preservation Office and the federal government's preservation efforts. In Ohio, the superintendent at Mound City Group National Monument, later Hopewell Culture NHP, filled this role.²

In 1989, NPS Director of the Midwest Region Don Castleberry asked Gibson, as Ohio state coordinator, to attend a meeting in Dayton about a possible national park site dedicated to aviation in that city. By the time Castleberry made this request, the NPS Midwest Regional Office (MWRO) had already done its own preliminary reconnaissance. Earlier in 1989, Gerald "Jerry" Sharkey, cofounder of Aviation Trail, Inc., contacted the NPS regional office, located in Omaha, Nebraska, to request an assessment of Dayton's aviation resources. In response, MWRO Historian Ron Cockrell performed a site visit on May 1 and 2, 1989, and found Dayton's resources worthy of further study. As a result, the regional office began a National Historic Landmark (NHL) survey, a process that also involved the preparation of individual NHL nominations.³

Simultaneously, Gibson, still superintendent at Hopewell Culture NHP, began building relationships with Dayton-area stakeholders. Throughout the assessment phase, which lasted from 1989 until the park's enabling legislation, passed in October 1992, Gibson served as the NPS's local point of contact in Dayton. He regularly attended meetings of the 2003 Fund Committee, the major local group pushing for NPS designation. He also played a major role in the NPS Study of Alternatives, the NPS's exploration of various options for preserving and interpreting Dayton's aviation heritage. In this effort, Gibson

¹ Benjamin Kline, "New Park Boss on Job Early," *Dayton Daily News*, May 13, 1993; William Gibson, Oral History 1993, interview by Ron Cockrell, August 24, 1993, 5, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; William Gibson, Oral History 2007, interview by Ed Roach and Ann Honious, April 17, 2007, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Ron Cockrell, *Amidst Ancient Monuments: The Administrative History of Mound City Group National Monument/Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, Ohio* (Omaha, NE: National Park Service, Midwest Support Office, Division of Cultural Resources, 1999).

² Ron Cockrell, *Amidst Ancient Monuments: The Administrative History of Mound City Group National Monument/Hopewell Culture National Historical Park, Ohio* (Omaha, NE: Division of Cultural Resources, Midwest Support Office, National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, 1999), 108.

³ Gibson, Oral History 1993, 21; Gibson, 3–4. In his 1993 oral history, Gibson says it was William Schenk who asked him to attend the meeting in Dayton; however, other sources consistently list Castleberry as regional director at the time of park formation.

served as a liaison between the 2003 Fund Committee, which funded the project, and the NPS Denver Service Center, which conducted the study.⁴ More detail on this study and the larger process of enlisting NPS involvement in Dayton can be found in Chapter 3, “The Beginnings of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP.”

After a multiyear assessment and authorization process, Gibson was named superintendent of Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park. Because the park was established shortly after the start of the 1993 federal fiscal year, however, it received no allocation for operating expenses until fiscal year (FY) 1994. The 1993 federal budget did provide \$50,000 to the newly established Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission, intended to oversee the development and management of cultural resources related to Dayton’s aviation history until the end of the commission’s lifespan, slated for January 1, 2004. However, the appointment of this commission was stymied by some concerns from the US Department of Justice over the wording of the legislation. In the absence of a functioning commission, the \$50,000 budgeted for aviation heritage in Dayton could not be disbursed.⁵

Despite this setback, Gibson was able to step into his Dayton job within six months of park authorization. Local advocates, under the auspices of the 2003 Fund Committee, pledged \$40,000 toward Gibson’s 1993 salary and expenses, and MWRO provided another \$10,000. These donations enabled Gibson to relocate to Dayton and begin work on park planning in April 1993, six months before the park’s first federal allocation for operating expenses in FY 1994.⁶

⁴ Cockrell, *Amidst Ancient Monuments*, 1999, 194; Gibson, Oral History 1993, 21.

⁵ William Gibson, “Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park February Briefing Statement” (February 12, 1993), folder 22, box 1, Bill Gibson Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; George T. Frampton Jr., “Letter to Representative Tony P. Hall from George T. Frampton, Jr., Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Department of the Interior,” May 3, 1994, folder 10, box 1, Bill Gibson Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁶ Kline, “New Park Boss on Job Early”; Gibson, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Briefing Statement, February 1993”; Cockrell, *Amidst Ancient Monuments*, 1999, 123.



Superintendent Bill Gibson leads a tour of Huffman Prairie Flying Field with media representatives.
Image: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

Park Planning and Relationship Building

In a 2007 interview, Gibson stated that his major goal in coming to the park was to build strong relationships with the many park partners. The 1997 General Management Plan (GMP) for the park echoed this point of view, declaring “Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park will not operate in isolation. Partnerships will be vital to its success.” Indeed, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP would succeed or fail based on its ability to form high-functioning relationships with local organizations.⁷

More was at stake, even, than the ultimate success of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. As detailed in Chapter 2, “The Federal Government in the Post-Industrial City,” in the early 1990s, partnership parks were being touted as the solution to the ongoing budget constraints of the agency. As a park unit with few cultural resources owned by the NPS, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP served as something of a laboratory for the partnership park model.

In fact, the park was used as a case study in a 2002 article on partnerships published in the *George Wright Forum*, an academic journal devoted to resource management issues. In this article, “The Success of Planning Partnerships,” Ronald W. Johnson, an NPS

⁷ Gibson, Oral History 2007, 6; National Park Service, “Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan” (Denver: US Department of the Interior, 1997), 16.

planner with the Denver Service Center, highlighted “the challenge to NPS [of melding] the newer non-traditional parks with the bureau’s more conventional operational, resource stewardship, and outreach policies.”⁸ He proceeded to offer case studies of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP; Sitka National Historical Park in Alaska; and the evaluation process for Moccasin Bend, a tract of land that had been considered for inclusion in Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park, straddling Georgia and Tennessee. With Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, at least, Johnson presented the case study from his own experience. He had been part of the NPS’s initial investigation into the possibility of a national park unit in Dayton, and later served as the team leader of the park’s 1997 general management plan. After considering the various partnership efforts of these NPS projects, Johnson concluded: “The Dayton model—fueled with a mix of federal, state, city, and private dollars—proves what can be accomplished. A partnership works if there is commitment from all partners to step forth. In Dayton, local and state governments as well as semi-private funders were available up front to get the project moving on a timely basis.”⁹

The park was indeed fortunate to have an enthusiastic local community, but this asset was sometimes at odds with the often-bureaucratic policies and practices of the National Park Service. Gibson understood his task to be “to find a way to work with these people, mixing the problems and constraints of the park service and the government administration with these grand expectations of the community and simply to make it happen.” Again, Gibson’s comments are echoed in the park’s GMP. Presumably in response to community suggestions, the NPS management plan emphatically states, “The park cannot expand to other areas that are threatened or may be threatened . . . without congressional mandate.”¹⁰

Based on its enabling legislation, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP had four units, each jointly managed by a different historical organization that would now be a partner to the new national park unit. The resources and relationships were composed of:

- The Paul Laurence Dunbar House, owned by the state of Ohio and operated by the Ohio Historical Society (now the Ohio History Connection))
- The Wright Cycle Company and Hoover Block, to be owned by the NPS
- Wright Hall and the 1905 Wright Flyer III, located at Carillon Historical Park (now operated by Dayton History)
- Huffman Prairie Flying Field, located at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base (AFB)

⁸ Ronald W. Johnson, “The Success of Planning Partnerships: Three National Park Service Case Studies,” *George Wright Forum* 19, no. 1 (2002): 85–86.

⁹ Johnson, 87.

¹⁰ Gibson, *Oral History* 2007, 6; National Park Service, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan,” 17.

The early years of the park were spent developing a cohesive vision for the various park units, creating consensus on that vision with park partners, and planning various physical and interpretive updates at the various sites, in anticipation of the 2003 Centennial of Flight. By the end of 1996, the park had received the title to the Hoover Block and the Wright Cycle Company building and had submitted a funding request to the NPS to rehabilitate these properties. Aviation Trail, Inc. had owned the properties previously, and sold them to the 2003 Fund Committee in 1995, which in turn donated the titles to the park. Preservation efforts on other park units were also well underway. Outbuildings at the Dunbar House were being rehabilitated, and Wright Hall was being expanded and its climate control systems improved.¹¹

Some of the most dramatic changes in the early years of the park took place at Wright-Patterson AFB. Since Huffman Prairie Flying Field is located on an active military base, certain accommodations for visitors were needed. In addition, the air force engaged the NPS to assist in planning a major rehabilitation of Wright Brothers Hill, including the local Wright Brothers Memorial (discussed in Chapter 8, “Cultural Resource Management”). Although not officially part of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, Wright Brothers Hill and the Wright Brothers Memorial are physically close to the flying field and interpretively linked. Finally, the air force conducted a feasibility study to establish an interpretive center adjacent to the memorial and up the hill from the flying field, which the park would staff and use to interpret the flying field.¹²

Much of the planning process for Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was encapsulated in the park’s general management plan (GMP) and interpretive plan, published jointly in 1997 after a multiyear process.¹³ GMPs have been a standard part of the NPS planning process for park units; and in the case of this park, the creation of a GMP was written into the enabling legislation.¹⁴ More recently, NPS foundation documents have taken over much of the GMP’s former function; Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP completed its “Foundation Document” in 2017.¹⁵

The park’s GMP articulated the vision for the park and outlined the specific steps the park would take to achieve this vision. The plan emphasized the collaborative nature of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP and thus devoted a good deal of space to outlining the

¹¹ William Gibson, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 1996” (Dayton: National Park Service, 1996), 2–3, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

¹² Gibson, 2–3; H. Eliot Foulds and Joseph H. Crystal, “Wright Brothers Hill Cultural Landscape Report: Treatment Plan for Landscape and Associated Features” (Dayton, OH: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, May 1998), National Park Service Electronic Technical Information Center, <https://pubs.nps.gov>.

¹³ National Park Service, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan.”

¹⁴ “Public Law 102-419: To Establish the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park” (1992), <https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/102/419.pdf>, Sec. 103(a).

¹⁵ “Foundation Document: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park” (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, January 2017), Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

park's roles in various areas, including public outreach, visitor services, and the preservation, development, and management of resources. The report also identified necessary staffing and the costs related to maintaining this staff, forecasting that the park would ultimately need 37.5 full-time equivalent workers.¹⁶ (The most staff the park has ever had was 21.59 full-time equivalency, in 2016. In 2021, the park had 17.79.¹⁷)

The park's interpretive plan was developed in conjunction with the GMP. It described the then-current visitor experience at each of the park sites, articulated the park's goals for enhancing those experiences, and identified specific steps for accomplishing those goals. The interpretive plan also detailed five overarching interpretive themes for the park and specifically listed the park resources that would contribute to the exploration of each theme.¹⁸ The 1997 interpretive plan, and its 2018 replacement, are discussed in detail in Chapter 9, "Interpretation and Education."

The five years following the park's establishment witnessed incredible progress under Gibson's leadership. Various degrees of rehabilitation started on each of the park resources; park partners were becoming more familiar with the culture and policies of the National Park Service; and multiple vital planning documents had been written, including the general management plan, interpretive plan, and cultural landscape report for Wright Brothers Hill and the Wright Brothers Memorial. Park documents do not reveal how long Gibson intended to oversee the park, but it appears likely that at some point, plans changed. Gibson was out on medical leave during most of FY 1998, and by the end of that calendar year, he had announced his plan to retire from the NPS, after thirty-five years with the agency and five years in an official capacity at Dayton. During Gibson's medical leave, Ann Deines Honious, the park historian, served as acting superintendent. After Gibson's retirement, Lawrence Blake stepped in as second superintendent of the park in January 1999.¹⁹

Lawrence Blake, Superintendent 1999–2008

Lawrence "Larry" Blake began his career with the National Park Service in 1975 at George Washington Memorial Parkway in Washington, DC. During his twenty-four-year NPS career prior to moving to Dayton, he worked at numerous national park units, having most recently served as deputy superintendent at Lincoln Home National Historic Site, in Springfield, Illinois, where he had been since 1987. Although new to the job of

¹⁶ National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan"; on staffing, see p. 39.

¹⁷ See Appendix C, "Budget Allocations and Full-Time Staff Equivalencies."

¹⁸ National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan."

¹⁹ William Gibson, "Superintendent's Report, FY 1998" (Dayton: National Park Service, 1998), 1, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Lawrence Blake, Oral History, interview by Ed Roach, March 20, 2006, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

superintendent, Blake was drawn to Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP by the potential to play an integral part in getting a new park up and running. In his own words, “I thought, what better, more exciting place to be than a new park that is just getting ready to complete its initial development phase and open up to the public for the first time.”²⁰

Preparing for the 2003 Centennial of Flight

Although planning and development of the park’s resources were well underway by the time Gibson retired, it fell to Blake to see most of these efforts through to completion and to ready the park for the 2003 Centennial of Flight celebrations. At the beginning of Blake’s tenure, the largest issue facing the park was the construction of both the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center (WDIC) and the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center (HPFFIC). Construction plans for the WDIC had undergone numerous incarnations, as the NPS and ATI negotiated whether to have visitor centers next door to each other (in the Hoover Block and reconstructed Setzer Building, respectively) or to somehow combine the buildings and have a joint facility.²¹ These negotiations occupied much of Blake’s time in his first months as park superintendent. Finally, in 1999, the NPS and ATI signed a general agreement to join the historic Hoover Block and the reconstructed Setzer Building and to operate a joint ATI/NPS facility. The details of this plan are discussed in Chapter 5, “Park Partners.”²²

During the development of the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center in the park’s core parcel in West Dayton, the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center was being developed across town, within the boundaries of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. After the rehabilitation of Wright Brothers Hill and the Wright Brothers Memorial (which had been undertaken by the air force during Gibson’s time at the park), builders broke ground on the interpretive center in May 2000, and construction was completed by July 2002. At the same time the HPFFIC was under development, the NPS and Wright-Patterson AFB were developing plans to care for and interpret Huffman Prairie, also within the boundaries of the base.²³

²⁰ Blake, Oral History, 1.

²¹ Blake, 2–3.

²² Blake, 2–3; Lawrence Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2000” (National Park Service, 2000), 2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Lawrence Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2001” (National Park Service, 2001), 2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Lawrence Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2003” (National Park Service, 2003), 1–2, 4, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Dean Alexander, “State of the Park Report, FY 2014” (National Park Service, 2014), 1, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

²³ Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2000,” 5; Lawrence Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2002” (National Park Service, 2002), 3, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2003,” 1, 4; Alexander, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP State of the Park Report, FY 2014,” 2.



Superintendent Larry Blake (left) and Jack Carnery, when the Olympic torch relay came through Dayton, January 3, 2002. Image: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

This flurry of development becomes all the more impressive when we realize the larger historical context. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, led to a period of heightened security in the United States and particularly at sites related to the federal government. Huffman Prairie Flying Field, the HPFFIC, and the Wright Brothers Memorial—all located within the boundaries of Wright-Patterson AFB—were affected. All were closed for fifteen months—from September 11, 2001, to December 17, 2002—while the air force restricted civilian access to the base until new security measures were implemented. The HPFFIC was dedicated once the base reopened, just two weeks before the start of the 2003 commemorative year.²⁴

In the years preceding the 2003 centennial, the Wright Brothers Aviation Center at Carillon Historical Park also became the focus of a rehabilitation effort. In FY 2001, two new interpretive wings were added, while the original building was rehabilitated. Conservation of the 1905 Wright Flyer III, housed within the aviation center, was also completed during FY

²⁴ Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2003,” 3. Wright Brothers Hill reopened to the public briefly during August 2002, to give visitors a sneak peek at the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center.

2001. Upon completion of these efforts, the complex was renamed the John W. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers Aviation Center in a dedication ceremony held in April 2002. This name would change to the John W. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers National Museum in 2018.²⁵

2003 Centennial of Flight

Although the park's cultural resources had been accessible to visitors throughout the park's development phase, its initial rehabilitation efforts and both interpretive centers were not all completed until 2003, the hundredth anniversary of Orville and Wilbur's first successful flight at Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina. As discussed in the previous chapter, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP participated in a year of festivities that took place around the world and several weeks of celebrations in Dayton itself during July 2003.

It was a banner year for the park. In anticipation of the centennial, federal appropriations to the park doubled between FY 2002 and FY 2003. Within a fifteen-month period, between April 2002 and July 2003, the park and its partners held dedication ceremonies for the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center, the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center, and the John W. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers Aviation Center. In this same time frame, an NPS handbook, *First in Flight: The Wright Brothers and the Invention of the Airplane*, a joint venture between Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP and the Wright Brothers National Memorial in North Carolina, was published by the NPS Harpers Ferry Center in December 2002; a new park brochure was released in June 2003; and Eastern National published *What Dreams We Have*, a book about the park's resources by Park Historian Ann Deines Honious, originally written as a historic resource study. Finally, during FY 2003, a renovation of the Dunbar House visitor center was completed, and the city of Dayton donated two parcels to the park—26 and 30 S. Williams Street—doubling the properties owned by the NPS in Dayton. The other properties already owned by the NPS were the Hoover Block and the Wright Cycle Company building at 22 S. Williams Street.²⁶

²⁵ Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2001," 3; Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2002," 3; Lawrence Blake, "Summary of Development Activities" (n.d.), folder 32, box 1, Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

²⁶ Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2002," 3; Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2003," 1–2; Tom D. Crouch, *First Flight: The Wright Brothers and the Invention of the Airplane*, Handbook 159 (Washington, DC: National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center, 2002); Ann Honious, *What Dreams We Have: The Wright Brothers and Their Hometown of Dayton, Ohio* (Fort Washington, PA: Eastern National, 2003); Bob Petersen, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

Beyond the Centennial

The 2003 Centennial of Flight prompted the United States to reflect on the significance of aviation to the nation's history. This consideration did not end with the centennial year, and in fact, two important initiatives, which began in the lead-up to the centennial, reached their culmination following the anniversary, in 2004. That year, the National Park Service released a National Historic Landmark Theme Study on aviation heritage (which was subsequently revised in 2011). NHL theme studies provide a historic context for an under-represented aspect of history, for preservationists to use in identifying and evaluating properties related to that area of the past. Theme studies also do some of that legwork upfront, listing related properties that have already been identified and evaluated and appear to be eligible for National Historic Landmark designation.²⁷

Although the resources connected to Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP had already received designation (and thus were not directly affected by the theme study), the publication of the Aviation Heritage Theme Study signaled an additional recognition on the part of the federal government about the integral role aviation had played in US history. In a similar vein, in December 2004—after years of advocacy in Dayton and DC—the National Aviation Heritage Area, located throughout the Miami Valley, became a federally authorized reality. The details of the heritage area's establishment are provided in the previous chapter. Like the theme study, the authorization of this heritage area made a public statement about aviation's historical importance. This move also created a new partner for the park. Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP would provide assistance to the newly established entity, and both the park and the heritage area would benefit from the heightened tourist profile each received because of their proximity to the other.²⁸

One of the ways the park assisted the fledgling heritage area was by providing office space to the Aviation Heritage Foundation (now doing business as the National Aviation Heritage Alliance), the organization tasked with managing the National Aviation Heritage Area. These offices were located at 26 S. Williams Street, one of the parcels donated to the park by the city of Dayton in 2003. In 2005, the park, working with Ratio Architects, completed a historic structure report for the site, and between 2005 and 2006, park maintenance staff oversaw Chicataw Construction in the renovation of this building, creating offices to house the National Aviation Heritage Alliance.²⁹

²⁷ “American Aviation Heritage: A National Historic Landmarks Theme Study” (Washington, DC: National Park Service, March 2011), <http://npshistory.com/publications/nhl/theme-studies/aviation.pdf>.

²⁸ National Aviation Heritage Alliance, “National Aviation Heritage Area General Management Plan Executive Summary” (Dayton: Aviation Heritage Foundation, May 2008), 2.

²⁹ Lawrence Blake, “Superintendent's Report, FY 2004–2007” (National Park Service, 2007), 11, 21, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

Just two years after the worldwide commemoration of the Centennial of Flight in 2003, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP and its partners had another anniversary to celebrate, one with more local significance. October 5, 2005, marked the centennial of practical flight. Unlike the Wright brothers' first flight at Kitty Hawk in 1903, which lasted less than a minute, the first practical flight proved the viability of the Wrights' invention, when at Huffman Prairie in Dayton in 1905, Wilbur Wright stayed in the air for more than thirty-nine minutes, covering over twenty-four miles.³⁰

To commemorate the 2005 centennial, a celebration was held at Huffman Prairie Flying Field. Multiple organizations, including the park, the air force, the Federal Aviation Administration, the National Aviation Heritage Alliance, and Wright "B" Flyer Inc., cosponsored the festivities, which included speakers, a demonstration flight, an exhibition of historic airplane replicas, and NPS tours of the flying field. Approximately seven hundred people attended the celebration.³¹

General Operations

The solid plans laid by Gibson and other NPS personnel in the development stage of the 1990s had largely been accomplished by 2005; the park and its partners had successfully executed two centennial celebrations in three years; and even in the years immediately after the 2005 anniversary of practical flight, Blake and his staff continued an ambitious program of park projects.³²

In 2005, the park completed a general management plan amendment (GMPA).³³ The initiation of a second GMP process just five years after one had been completed is unusual but perhaps becomes more understandable in light of the 2003 centennial year. Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP had been authorized in 1992 with this centennial on the horizon, and its first decade had been largely devoted to getting the park fully operational and its partner sites updated in anticipation of the Centennial of Flight. The period immediately after was a time for the NPS to reflect and reassess its operations in Dayton. In the words of Park Historian Edward Roach, who joined the park in November 2003, "And I think there was a big question of, what next? What now? Especially after December of '03,

³⁰ Blake, 1–2.

³¹ Blake, 1–2.

³² Blake, 8, 13.

³³ National Park Service, "Draft General Management Plan Amendment Environmental Impact Statement" (Dayton: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, November 2005), Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

after everything had happened in North Carolina. So, what now? What happens now? The park's created; we have our interpretive centers open."³⁴ A GMPA process allowed the opportunity to explore those questions.

In addition, Roach recalled that Huffman Prairie Flying Field was a major impetus for the amendment:

Well, keep in mind, the original GMP is 1997. And Huffman Prairie Flying Field is on the air force base. And, you know, after 2001, after those attacks, the air force got a lot more picky about site access. So, one of the big issues with the GMPA was addressing site access to Huffman Prairie Flying Field, and in regard [to] air force site management and air force gates and things like that. And I will say that the recommendations of that GMPA have still not been completely implemented. We still don't have that—whichever number it is—access gate directly to the field that doesn't go by the rod and gun club, that doesn't go by the golf course. That—I mean, we do have a public access gate now, but it's a little convoluted. And I think you've been out there; it's not the easiest drive. So, I think that was one of the principal reasons that we had the GMPA going in that era.³⁵

At the same time that the GMPA was happening, the possibility emerged that the Wright Company factory buildings might become available. In preparation for that possibility, the NPS needed to assess the feasibility of adding the two factory buildings to the park boundary. As a result, the agency completed a boundary assessment and environmental study of the factory site in 2006, a project led by Sharon Miles at MWRO. The factory buildings, along with Hawthorn Hill, were indeed added to the park boundary in 2009.³⁶

Beyond planning, the park was also making strides in its interpretive offerings and infrastructure. In 2006–7, the park installed wayside exhibits throughout the city at sites associated with the Wright brothers and Paul Laurence Dunbar. In 2006, “On Great White Wings,” the park’s orientation film, was completed by Aperture Films, overseen by the NPS Harpers Ferry Center. And during 2007–8, Wright-Dunbar Plaza underwent redevelopment, which added some interpretive elements such as a new surface that showed the distance of the Wright brothers’ first flight in Kitty Hawk. (This element was removed in a later renovation of the plaza, undertaken during Dean Alexander’s superintendency.³⁷)

³⁴ Edward Roach, Oral History, interview by Susan Ferentinos, May 18, 2022, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

³⁵ Roach.

³⁶ Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2004–2007,” 21; “The Wright Company Factory Boundary Assessment and Environmental Assessment” (Dayton, OH: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, January 2006), Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

³⁷ Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2004–2007,” 8; Lawrence Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2008” (National Park Service, 2008), 3, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library, Edward Roach, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos, via email, February 15, 2022.

Outreach and Public Relations

Blake was a particularly community-oriented superintendent. As such, he was an excellent choice to lead the park through the centennial. In the years following the anniversary, he continued to raise the park's profile within the city of Dayton. In a 2006 oral history interview, Blake explained his philosophy about outreach: "You have to be fully aware of what's going on around the park, because everything has the potential to impact the park. And whether it's new policies or objectives on the part of the city government or the county government, state government, or other entities, they all have the potential to impact the national park. And one has to be constantly aware of kind of the changing environments around and see, you know, what the best way is to react to those changes."³⁸

As detailed in Chapter 10, "Serving the Visitors," park outreach began to shift its focus after 2003, seeking to draw not only aviation enthusiasts to the park but local residents as well. Park management invited community groups, such as the Women of Color Quilters Network, to hold their meetings at the park, and the park participated in the Urban Nights community gatherings that ran in Dayton from 2003 to 2015.³⁹

Blake also personally served in many local organizations and encouraged his staff to do the same. His cumulative superintendent's report from the 2004–7 period offers a glimpse at this involvement. Blake himself was a nonvoting member on the board of governors for Dayton History, on the board of directors of the Engineers Club of Dayton, served as vice-chair of the Dayton Convention and Visitors Bureau, as a trustee of Wright Dunbar, Inc., and on the board of the National Aviation Heritage Area. The park's management assistants (Timothy Good, then Nicholas Georgeff, who replaced Good in 2006) served as "a non-voting liaison at meetings of the American Veterans Heritage Center; Aviation Trail, Inc., Wright 'B' Flyer; on several Wright-Patterson Air Force Base event planning committees; and on several Dayton History committees."⁴⁰

In addition to raising the park's profile within the city, Blake also strove to raise the city's profile on a larger stage. It was during his superintendency that Dayton's aviation sites were added to the Tentative List of World Heritage Sites, an effort discussed in the previous chapter. Blake also advocated for the city's inclusion in a special resource study to consider the creation of a national park unit devoted to the Manhattan Project, a national effort during World War II to develop the atomic bomb.

³⁸ Blake, Oral History, 8.

³⁹ Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2004–2007," 3.

⁴⁰ Blake, 2–3.

In 2004, Congress passed Public Law 108-340, instructing the US Department of the Interior to “conduct a study on the preservation and interpretation of historic sites of the Manhattan Project for potential inclusion in the National Park System.”⁴¹ The study area was originally Los Alamos National Laboratory and town site in New Mexico, Hanford Site in Washington state, and Oakridge Reservation in Tennessee. However, Dayton also played a role in the Manhattan Project, refining and producing the polonium that was used in the bomb triggers. According to Park Historian Edward Roach, Blake advocated for Dayton’s inclusion in the study to Ohio Senator Mike DeWine, who then used a colloquy on the floor of the Senate to have Dayton added to the congressional directive.⁴²

Roach served as a local liaison on the NPS study team, which also included agency professionals from the Denver Service Center; the Pacific West, Midwest, Intermountain, and Southeast Regional Offices; and Bandelier National Monument (who presumably served as a local liaison in New Mexico). The US Department of Energy was also represented on the project team.⁴³ With regard to the Dayton resources, the report concluded:

Although the Dayton sites are potentially suitable and may possess national significance, the individual sites do not meet the same level of integrity as those in the other three locations. Nor do they meet the feasibility factors considered necessary for effective and efficient management to the extent the other sites do. In particular, there are no entities, forthcoming at this time, who are committed to preserving the historic Manhattan Project facilities in Dayton. Should interest in Dayton develop in the future, once the sites are preserved, these sites may be considered as an affiliated site along with other Manhattan Project associated resources at other locations throughout the nation.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, as part of the research conducted for this study, Roach completed a National Register of Historic Places nomination for Unit III of the Dayton Project, a Monsanto research facility that coordinated Dayton’s efforts on the larger Manhattan Project.⁴⁵ The other sites studied—Los Alamos, Hanford, and Oakridge—were ultimately designated Manhattan Project National Historical Park.⁴⁶

⁴¹ National Park Service, “Manhattan Project Sites Special Resource Study/Environmental Assessment” (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, September 2010), 3, <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=482&projectID=14946&documentID=42108>.

⁴² Roach, Oral History; National Park Service, “Manhattan Project Sites Special Resource Study/Environmental Assessment,” 3.

⁴³ National Park Service, “Manhattan Project Sites Special Resource Study/Environmental Assessment,” 3. The report does not give the names of the people who served on the study team, only the offices they represented.

⁴⁴ National Park Service, 4–5.

⁴⁵ Edward Roach, “Unit III, Dayton Project,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2006), <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/71990615>; Roach, Oral History.

⁴⁶ “Manhattan Project National Historical Park,” National Park Service, May 3, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/mapr/index.htm>.

On August 16, 2006, First Lady Laura Bush, in town for a fundraising luncheon for Senator DeWine, visited the park. She spent about two hours touring the resources in the Wright-Dunbar neighborhood and delivered brief public remarks, in which she—as so many had done before her—emphasized the park’s potential for economic development.⁴⁷ In her words, “This area is a really wonderful example for the rest of the country of a way to use your historic assets and literary assets to try to revitalize neighborhoods.”⁴⁸ The following year, Aviation Trail, Inc. awarded Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP its 2007 Trailblazer Award.⁴⁹ Considering the array of park activity in the first decade of the twenty-first century, the reasons why the park received this honor become clear.



First Lady Laura Bush listens to a Paul Laurence Dunbar poem at the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center during a visit to the park in August 2006.

Image: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

⁴⁷ Joanne Huist Smith, “Laura Bush Takes Tour of Historic Area, Raises Funds for DeWine,” *Dayton Daily News*, August 17, 2006.

⁴⁸ “Mrs. Bush’s Remarks after Visit to Wright-Dunbar Village,” National Archives and Records Administration, August 16, 2006, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/08/text/20060816-2.html>.

⁴⁹ Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2004–2007.”

Blake considered his community work an accomplishment on par with guiding the park through the Centennial of Flight, and he counted both these efforts as his biggest achievements while serving in Dayton:

The other side of that in terms of achievements is the relationships that have been established with the community during this same time period. The park—and we’re not any different at Dayton than any other national park—really cannot survive in advance in this day and age without strong community support, and it’s also been very satisfying to see the recognition level and appreciation for the park rise and the involvement of the community directly in the park and the community coming to the park, looking to the park for guidance and assistance with other major preservation efforts that the community would like to take on.⁵⁰

* * *

After ten years at the helm of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, Lawrence Blake retired from the NPS in November 2008. As he prepared his exit, Blake was honored with an editorial in the *Dayton Daily News*, extolling the contributions he had made to the community. The editorial described Blake as “one of Dayton’s champions” and quoted Wright descendent Amanda Wright Lane as saying, “The only thing Larry hasn’t done for the park is get it some buffalo.”⁵¹

Dean Alexander, Superintendent 2009–2017

After Blake’s retirement, Mark Weekley, program manager for the Midwest Region Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program, served as acting superintendent for two of the four months before the arrival of the park’s third superintendent, Dean Alexander. Like his predecessors, Alexander had a long career in the National Park Service—twenty-two years, in fact—before becoming superintendent of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. A former Chief of Planning in the NPS Midwest Regional Office, he had actually been involved in the beginning phases of the park’s first GMP in the mid-1990s before leaving to take his first superintendent position at Kalaupapa National Historical Park in Hawaii. After five years at Kalaupapa, Alexander became superintendent at Hopewell Culture NHP, in 2001. From there, as Bill Gibson had done before him, Alexander became superintendent at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, a position he started in March 2009.⁵²

⁵⁰ Blake, Oral History, 12.

⁵¹ Ellen Belcher, “Dayton’s National Park Built on Passion,” *Dayton Daily News*, August 24, 2008.

⁵² Dean Alexander, Oral History, interview by Casey Huegel, December 6, 2017, 1–2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Steve Bennish, “Dayton Aviation Heritage Park Gets Superintendent,” *Dayton Daily News*, January 23, 2009.

In comparing his time as superintendent to his predecessors, Alexander has said, “I essentially got gifted this operating park.”⁵³ While it is true that by 2009 Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was well out of the development phase, it is also true that, upon assuming the superintendency, Alexander was immediately confronted with major resource challenges.

Addition of New Properties to the Park, 2009

In early 2009, Public Law 111-11 brought two additional Wright brothers’ resources into the park boundary. These sites were Hawthorn Hill and the Wright Company factory buildings, which together represented a later period in the development of aviation than other park resources. Both sites had been considered for inclusion in the original legislation establishing the park but had ultimately been excluded from the original park boundaries (see Chapter 4, “Becoming a National Historical Park”). Now, in 2009, they had at last been included—at the very moment Alexander was stepping into his new role.⁵⁴

Despite being added to the park boundary, Hawthorn Hill did not change owners. The Wright Family Foundation retained ownership of the property; however, in 2013 the foundation gifted the property to Dayton History, which had been managing the site and overseeing visitor access. The NPS primarily offers technical assistance for this site.⁵⁵

Ownership, management, and remediation of the Wright Company factory buildings—also added to the park in 2009—proved more complicated. The factory buildings are located in West Dayton and date from the period 1910–16. As a former industrial site, the factory buildings are required to go through environmental remediation, an involved process that, in the case of NPS sites, can influence ownership. After a costly cleanup of hazardous waste at the Krejci Dump in Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area (now Cuyahoga Valley National Park), US Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan issued an order stating that the NPS must conduct inspections for hazardous waste before purchasing any tract of land.⁵⁶ The timing of the factory inspections also had an impact. Alexander saw the public health crisis in Flint, Michigan, as playing a role. He believed that situation, involving lead-contaminated water and public officials receiving criminal charges, “made every environmental regulator in the country much more risk averse.” The unique issues presented by the inclusion of the factory site occupied much of Alexander’s tenure at the park.⁵⁷

⁵³ Alexander, Oral History, 7.

⁵⁴ Dean Alexander, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2009–2011” (National Park Service, 2011), 11, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Alexander, Oral History, 2–3.

⁵⁵ Alexander, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2009–2011,” 11, 17, 19; Alexander, Oral History, 2–4.

⁵⁶ Ron Cockrell, *A Green Shrouded Miracle: The Administrative History of Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area, Ohio* (Omaha, NE: National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, 1992), 376–78.

⁵⁷ Alexander, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2009–2011,” 11; Alexander, Oral History, 4–6; Alexander, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP State of the Park Report, FY 2014,” 4.

Aftermath of the 2008 Financial Crash

The global financial meltdown of 2008 was still playing out in spring 2009 when Alexander became Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's third superintendent. In addition to causing the Wright Company factory site to change hands multiple times, the economic situation had two other major impacts on the park. One was the issue of federal funding. As a result of the recession (and perhaps also increasing national debt), NPS budgets have failed to grow at previous rates, and this in turn has led to a trend away from the acquisition of new resources. While the effect of this policy has no doubt been felt throughout national park units, it has had particular implications in Dayton. At a park that does not own the majority of its resources, having no possibility of acquiring these resources has required occasional maneuvering, such as when facing a succession of owners at the factory site and the financial floundering of the Ohio Historical Society, a park partner with oversight of the Paul Laurence Dunbar House.⁵⁸

In the wake of the financial crisis, the Ohio Historical Society (now the Ohio History Connection) experienced significant reductions in state funding in three consecutive fiscal years (2008–10), prompting the organization to cease operation of most of its public historic sites throughout the state, including the Dunbar House. At first, the Ohio Historical Society significantly reduced visitation hours at the Dunbar site but managed to keep it open. Eventually, however, the organization closed the site altogether in March 2009, the same month Alexander became park superintendent. After a few months of negotiating among partners, the house reopened under the day-to-day management of Dayton History, which would provide tours of the house, while the Ohio Historical Society would continue to maintain the building.

In the early 2010s, however, three violent crimes occurred near the property, and Dayton History grew concerned for the safety of its staff working at the house.⁵⁹ The organization remained the local partner for the Dunbar House, but Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP took over day-to-day staffing at the site. In the words of Alexander: “We [NPS staff] really were kind of confronted with a question of conscience about whether a site that commemorated a major African American poet and author should be closed to the public or if we should try and do something to get it open. Ultimately, we decided to provide staffing for it even if it meant curtailing some things, and we decided that was a higher priority.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Alexander, Oral History, 6–8.

⁵⁹ Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2008,” 6; Alexander, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2009–2011,” 16; Jim DeBrosse, “New Deal Could Open Dunbar House by June—Ohio Historical Society Will Maintain Facility,” *Dayton Daily News*, April 8, 2009; Alexander, Oral History, 7–9.

⁶⁰ Alexander, Oral History, 7–8.



Dean Alexander, who served as superintendent of Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, 2009–17, pictured here in 2014. Image: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

Sequestration

Another major economic challenge confronted the park in the form of government sequestration. While government shutdowns furlough federal employees until Congress can agree on a budget, sequestration is a rarer event that requires government agencies to cut funding that has already been allocated to them.⁶¹ In March 2013, Congress issued a sequestration order requiring across-the-board cuts to the federal budget totaling \$85 billion. The National Park Service was required to cut 5 percent of its discretionary funding and 5.1 percent of its mandatory budget resources. According to NPS Director Jonathan Jarvis, “The law requires that sequestration cuts be taken proportionately from each account. . . . For NPS, this involves cuts for each park and organization as presented in our annual budget justification.”⁶²

Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was required to cut \$100,000 from its annual budget, which it did by reducing seasonal hires. This, in turn, required the park to reduce its visitor center hours by a half hour each day and reduce programming for visitors.⁶³

⁶¹ Dylan Matthews, “The Sequester: Absolutely Everything You Could Possibly Need to Know, in One FAQ,” *Washington Post*, February 20, 2013, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2013/02/20/the-sequester-absolutely-everything-you-could-possibly-need-to-know-in-one-faq/>; “Q&A: Everything You Should Know About Government Shutdowns,” Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, September 23, 2021, <https://www.crfb.org/papers/qa-everything-you-should-know-about-government-shutdowns>.

⁶² Jonathan Jarvis, “Federal Agency Sequestration - 4.16.13,” US Department of the Interior, Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs, April 16, 2013, https://www.doi.gov/ocl/hearings/113/federalagencysequestration_041613.

⁶³ Ken McCall, “Federal Cuts to Hit Local Programs—Head Start, Public Defenders, National Parks to Be Affected,” *Dayton Daily News*, April 29, 2013.

These cold facts, however, don't necessarily capture the pressure of the budget crisis, particularly for stewards of one-of-a-kind resources. The recollections of Nicholas Georgeff perhaps come closer:

And then also we have sequestration. So, the park budget was greatly slashed. So here he is [Dean Alexander], he has a bunch of stuff that we don't want to let go, but we have to figure out how to manage with our very, very limited resources. And our FTE [full-time equivalency of staff] when I first saw in the park was 29, And now we're at 18 FTE. But our mission has expanded, and we have less people. That's nothing new; I'm sure all the other parks had the same experiences. But Dean's task was to figure out, okay, how do we continue to move these forward with the limited funding that we have and keep it together? Or, as opposed to, "You know what? It's no longer important. Let's just cut it out and we'll retract and fight the battle another day." But then these sites may not be there... , like the Wright lab got—fell apart, got levelled, became an ATM site... . So, we don't want that to happen anymore. So, he had to keep that all together.⁶⁴

In 2017, Alexander offered a small glimpse into the difficulty of that time. Reflecting on his time at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, he listed "keeping our head above water through sequestration" as among his biggest accomplishments.⁶⁵

General Operations

While the Wright Company factory buildings, Hawthorn Hill, and the Dunbar House required a great deal of time and focus, other aspects of park management proceeded, and in some areas, important progress was achieved. The park collaborated with the air force to build a storage facility near Huffman Prairie Flying Field, to house the Valentine Flyer (owned by Wright "B" Flyer Inc.). The storage facility was completed in 2010. That same year, Aviation Trail, Inc. finished its parachute museum. Housed within the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center, the museum had been partially open for a number of years, but ATI was able to complete the project in 2010.⁶⁶

During Alexander's tenure, the park maintained a robust approach to public outreach, details of which are provided in Chapter 10, "Serving the Visitors." The park continued sending rangers and interpretive materials to various aviation events in the region; however, other efforts did not confine themselves to aviation. Rather, Alexander and his staff made a concerted effort to raise the park's profile as a local community asset

⁶⁴ Nicholas Georgeff, Oral History II, interview by Susan Ferentinos, May 10, 2022, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library. According to park records, full-time staff equivalencies have never been higher than 22.

⁶⁵ Alexander, Oral History, 16.

⁶⁶ Alexander, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009–2011," 16–17; Edward Roach, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

and as a good neighbor to West Dayton in particular. Efforts included donating food grown in the park garden to a local food pantry and partnering with Mound Street Academy High School on a project called “The Wright Path,” which provided students who had dropped out of school a chance to continue their education.⁶⁷

Finally, in the area of planning efforts, Alexander oversaw the creation of two park-wide documents: the “Foundation Document” and the long-range interpretive plan. In the words of the NPS, “The core components of a “Foundation Document” include a brief description of the park as well as the park’s purpose, significance, fundamental resources and values, other important resources and values, and interpretive themes. . . . Along with the core components, the assessment provides a focus for park planning activities and establishes a baseline from which planning documents are developed.” Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP’s “Foundation Document” was released in 2017, shortly before Alexander’s retirement.⁶⁸ Its second long-range interpretive plan, although not released until 2018, was mostly undertaken while Alexander was at the helm, and the report includes him among its core team.⁶⁹ After thirty years with the National Park Service, and eight years as superintendent of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, Dean Alexander retired from the park service in 2017.

Kendell Thompson, Superintendent 2018–

After Alexander’s retirement, Kendell Thompson was appointed as acting superintendent of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP in August 2017. He stepped into the position of permanent superintendent of the park a year later. Thompson came to Dayton from southern Indiana, where he had served as superintendent of Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial for eight years. His professional career with the National Park Service began in the 1980s, although he grew up around the agency. His father was also a career NPS employee, and Thompson began volunteering in the national parks as a teenager. Before arriving in Dayton, Thompson had previously worked in over a dozen national park units throughout the United States. These included Denali National Park; Pearl Harbor National Memorial; Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve; and Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial.⁷⁰

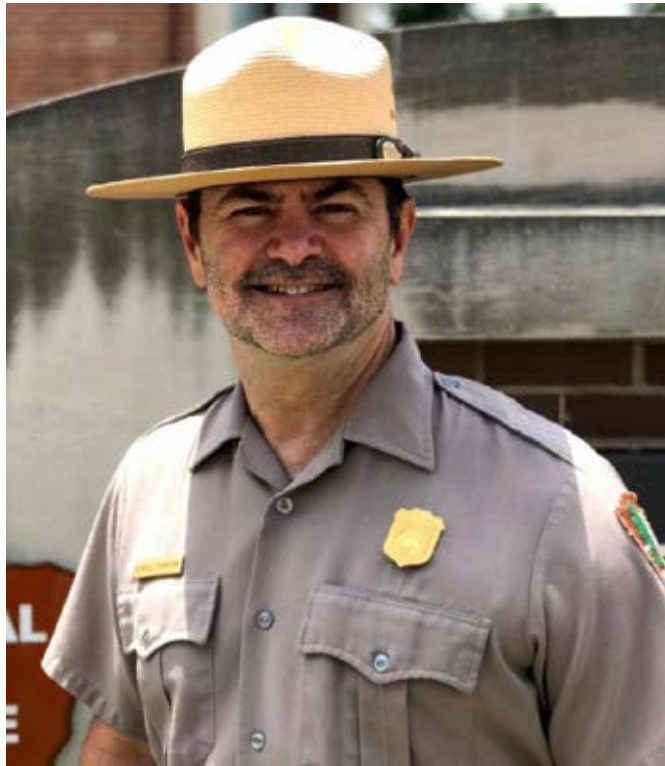
⁶⁷ Alexander, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP State of the Park Report, FY 2014,” 3–4; Dean Alexander, “State of the Park Report, FY 2015” (National Park Service, 2015), 3, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁶⁸ “Foundation Document: Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP,” quotation 2.

⁶⁹ Interpretive Solutions Inc., “Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Long-Range Interpretive Plan” (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, December 2018), 75.

⁷⁰ Max Filby, “New Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Leader Named,” *Dayton Daily News*, July 12, 2018; Timothy R. Gaffney, “Kendell Thompson to Head Dayton’s National Park,” LinkedIn, July 11, 2018, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/kendell-thompson-head-daytons-national-park-timothy-gaffney/?articleId=6422870411402366976>.

Thompson joined the park right around its twenty-five-year mark, which meant that many key documents were in the process of being revised. Money for the park's first administrative history was obligated shortly after his arrival, and an update to the general management plan was soon initiated. This was to be the park's first general management plan amendment (GMPA) since 2005, and much had changed since then.⁷¹ Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was now long past the fervor and publicity of the centennial of flight, an event that had sustained much of the park's focus in its first decade. Park boundaries had been expanded to include two new areas, Hawthorn Hill and the Wright Company factory buildings. Day-to-day operations at the Dunbar House had shifted first from Ohio History Connection to Dayton History and then from Dayton History to the NPS. Social media and video conferencing had fundamentally changed how people interact with historic sites. Finally, climate change had become an undeniable reality, demanding focus and resources from all parts of the National Park System.



Kendell Thompson, pictured here, became the park's fourth superintendent in 2018.
Image: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

⁷¹ This report is the administrative history mentioned; National Park Service, "Draft General Management Plan Amendment Environmental Impact Statement."

The COVID-19 Pandemic

Unfortunately, the GMPA process—along with so many other things—was delayed when, in March 2020, the start of a global pandemic of the COVID-19 coronavirus prompted a national shutdown of most elements of daily in-person interaction. Huge portions of the US workforce were furloughed, lost their jobs, or scrambled to adapt quite suddenly to working virtually from home.

Offices, schools, restaurants, and many stores began closing in response to the virus during the second week of March 2020. On March 17, the national communications office of the National Park Service announced that the agency was taking “extraordinary steps” to respond to public health guidance from the White House and the Centers for Disease Control. The agency announced it was modifying operations throughout the National Park System, although individual superintendents were given final authority in determining specifics.⁷² The following day, March 18, 2020, Thompson publicly announced that all visitor facilities at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP would be closed until further notice, effective immediately. The outdoor spaces of Wright-Dunbar Plaza (between the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center and the Wright Cycle Company), Huffman Prairie Flying Field, and the local Wright Brothers Memorial (though not part of the park) would remain open during daylight hours. Park employees were instructed to work from home.⁷³

What was expected by many experts to last two weeks turned into months. Most indoor spaces at national park units remained closed until at least June 2020, and many did not resume full operation until the following year. Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP reopened in phases. Dayton History reopened Carillon Historical Park—including the John W. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers National Museum—to visitors, with added health precautions in July 2020, as case numbers began to decline.⁷⁴ The park reopened the Wright Cycle Company that month as well, while the park’s interpretive team staffed a table in front of the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center (WDIC) between July and September 2020, when that building reopened as well. COVID cases began to increase again later that fall of 2020, forcing the cycle shop and the WDIC to close again in late November. They remained shuttered until April 2021. The Huffman Prairie Interpretive Center was closed from

⁷² Office of Communications, US National Park Service, “National Park Service Is Modifying Operations to Implement Latest Health Guidance,” National Park Service, March 17, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1207/statmentonparkopscovid19.htm>.

⁷³ Kendell Thompson, “Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Is Modifying Operations to Implement Latest Health Guidance,” Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, March 18, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/daav/learn/news/dayton-aviation-heritage-national-historical-park-is-modifying-operations-to-implement-latest-health-guidance.htm>.

⁷⁴ Meredith Moss, “Museums Reopening: 3 Directors Tell Us What Visitors Can Expect,” *Dayton Daily News*, June 15, 2020.

March 2020 until May 2021, while the Dunbar House remained closed until June 2021. More than two years into the pandemic, many of the park's behind-the-scenes workers continue to work from home, a circumstance that may well become permanent.⁷⁵

Reflecting on the park's reaction to the pandemic in November 2021, Management Assistant Nicholas Georgeff praised his colleagues' response: "I believe that at Dayton Aviation, we have great leadership across the board. We discussed that, we looked at, again, our mission statements. We looked at our directives on what we need to do, and we figured out a way to where we can meet that. Part of that was an investment in technology, so we can communicate with staff and communicate with the public. And...while you can always say there's always room for improvement...I believe that we actually have engaged the public very, very well during this timeframe,...during the COVID challenges that have come up."⁷⁶ Elaborating, Georgeff explained, "the online presence was secondary prior to the pandemic. But during the pandemic, it became a primary engagement." The park continued to serve its public through social media and virtual interpretive programs.⁷⁷

Relationships with Nearby National Park Units

The national park units of Ohio and Indiana vary greatly by size and age, ranging from the state's oldest NPS unit, Hopewell Culture NHP, authorized in 1923, to its newest unit, Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument, authorized in 2013, and from William Howard Taft National Historic Site, which comprises three acres, to Cuyahoga Valley National Park, encompassing 33,000 acres. Over the course of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's existence, various efforts have been made to pool resources between national park sites in this area of the NPS Midwest Region.⁷⁸

Early in the park's history, the NPS implemented a short-lived cluster system, "to share resources and reduce redundancies." Under this system, a Southern Ohio Group was formed, consisting of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, Hopewell Cultural NHP, and William Howard Taft National Historic Site in Cincinnati. Under this structure, some staff had responsibilities at all three parks.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ My thanks to interpretive ranger Bob Petersen for providing this timeline of reopenings. Bob Petersen, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

⁷⁶ Nicholas Georgeff, Oral History I, interview by Susan Ferentinos, November 4, 2021, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁷⁷ Georgeff.

⁷⁸ Cockrell, *Amidst Ancient Monuments*, 1999, 39.

⁷⁹ Gibson, "Superintendent's Report, FY 1996," 1, 3; Gibson, "Superintendent's Report, FY 1998," 1; Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2000," 1; Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2003," 1; Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2008," 1; Alexander, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009–2011," 1; Cockrell, *Amidst Ancient Monuments*, 1999, 123; Alexander, Oral History, 13–14.

More long-standing has been Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's outsourcing of much of its administrative work to other parks. For most of the park's history, it shared an administrative officer, Bonnie Murray, with Hopewell Culture NHP. Murray recalled this as initially providing advantages to the park in Dayton. Because of her long-standing relationship with the regional office and with Dayton's first superintendent, Bill Gibson, she was able to establish the administrative systems at the new park quickly and efficiently.⁸⁰ However, over time, as Dayton's administrative needs grew, Murray sometimes felt stretched too thin. "I think there were many times that each park was uncomfortable with the expanded arrangement and felt that they needed more of my time. Each, at times, felt like the neglected stepchild."⁸¹

Upon Murray's retirement in 2013, the NPS chose to consolidate the administrative duties at multiple parks—including Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP—into one position operating out of Indiana Dunes National Park, in northern Indiana. Along the same lines, for most of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's history—at least 1998 to the present—its human resources functions have been handled out of Cuyahoga Valley National Park in northeastern Ohio.⁸² Park managers do not seem to have been particularly satisfied with this arrangement. In the words of Superintendent Alexander, "Unfortunately, what I think it turned out being was allocating funds from some of the smallest parks in this part of the region to some of the biggest parks in the region."⁸³ Bonnie Murray concurs, stating, "Some services such as contracting were more successful than others, but for the majority of services, sharing over multiple parks was more of a hassle than [a] benefit. I did not agree with the idea that administrative services can be done from anywhere. I truly believe it takes a more direct knowledge of specific park operations to provide quality service. One size does not fit all."⁸⁴

Other instances of sharing resources have taken place on an as-needed basis. The FY 2000 Superintendent's Report stated that Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP had received resource management assistance from Gia Wagner, who was then working for Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial in southern Indiana. Around this same time, Park Historian Ann Honious assisted staff at Hopewell Culture NHP with cultural resource assessments and determinations of eligibility. More recently, current park historian Edward Roach

⁸⁰ Bonnie Murray, "RE: Questions for Bonnie Murray," November 2, 2021, 2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁸¹ Murray, 2.

⁸² Gibson, "Superintendent's Report, FY 1996," 3; Gibson, "Superintendent's Report, FY 1998," 1; Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2000," 1; Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2001," 1; Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2008," 1; Alexander, Oral History, 14; Alexander, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009–2011," 1.

⁸³ Alexander, Oral History, 14.

⁸⁴ Murray, "RE: Questions for Bonnie Murray," November 2, 2021, 2.

regularly assists staff at Charles Young National Monument and William Howard Taft National Historic Site with Section 106 historic preservation reviews, in addition to handling these responsibilities for Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP and local park partners.⁸⁵

The park seems to have had its closest relationship with Hopewell Culture NHP, located eighty miles away. Many long-term Dayton employees worked at Hopewell Culture NHP prior to or concurrent to working in Dayton. The two parks have also shared a collections storage facility, located in Chillicothe, since 2011. And between 2012 and 2017, the two parks shared a superintendent in Dean Alexander. Alexander was primarily based in Dayton during this period, traveling to Hopewell Culture NHP regularly. The joint superintendency ended upon Alexander's retirement.⁸⁶

These cost-saving measures represent a constant balancing act, as the NPS strives to use its budget efficiently while also ensuring optimal stewardship of resources and service to the visitors.

⁸⁵ Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2000," 3; Alexander, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP State of the Park Report, FY 2014," 3 Ann Honious and Edward Roach, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

⁸⁶ Gibson, Oral History 1993, 14; Alexander, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009–2011," 13; Alexander, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP State of the Park Report, FY 2014," 2; Alexander, Oral History, 15–16; Edward Roach, "RE: Review: Staff," email to Susan Ferentinos, June 7, 2022.



NPS poster encouraging people to explore park websites, released April 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Image: Matt Turner, NPS Media Gallery, Asset ID: ffc140b3-1ce1-4988-abfc-cad3de78ddce.

Funding Levels

This narrative provides a general overview of funding trends; specific budget numbers for the period 1997–2021 appear in Appendix C. Within the federal government budget, allocations for Operations of the National Park Service are referred to by the acronym ONPS. Each park receives an ONPS allocation, which is intended to cover staff salaries and basic operating expenses, while special projects and capital improvements are funded through specific budget lines. Because Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP is a partnership park, park partners contribute a significant amount of funding to the overall operations of the park. The following narrative discussion draws from both the park’s annual Superintendent Reports and information provided by LuAnn Hart, the park’s budget analyst, in 2021. There are discrepancies between these numbers, but the general trends remain the same. The information in Appendix C is drawn from Hart’s data.

The 1993 federal fiscal year had already begun by the time the park was authorized by Congress, and thus the park received no operating funds that year. However, donations from local stakeholders and the NPS Midwest Regional Office enabled Superintendent William Gibson to begin work in Dayton in April 1993, rather than wait until the FY 1994 ONPS budget went into effect after the start of the fiscal year on October 1, 1993.⁸⁷

By its third year of development, the park’s ONPS allocation was still quite modest, at \$224,000 for FY 1996. Three years later, in FY 1999, the park’s allocation had nearly doubled. In addition, in FY 1998, \$3.5 million had been earmarked to begin the rehabilitation of the Hoover Block, the first substantial development project at the park to use NPS funds.⁸⁸

Operating funds remained relatively constant for a few years after that; however, funding for the development of the park continued. In FY 2000, the park received \$410,000 “for the planning of East Interpretive Center [now called the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center] exhibits, a park orientation film and a parkwide wayside exhibit plan.” In FY 2001, exhibit development at Huffman Prairie Flying Field received special project funds of \$1.3 million.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Gibson, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Briefing Statement, February 1993”; Kline, “New Park Boss on Job Early”; Cockrell, *Amidst Ancient Monuments*, 1999, 123.

⁸⁸ Gibson, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 1996,” 2–3; Gibson, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 1998,” 2; Appendix C.

⁸⁹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “CPI Inflation Calculator,” US Department of Labor, n.d., https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm; Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2000,” 1; Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2001,” 2. Base funding in FY2001 was \$581,000.

As the park neared the 2003 Centennial of Flight, the park's federal allocation increased. The park's operating budget jumped by about 50 percent between FY2001 (\$587,200) and FY 2002 (\$876,500) in FY 2002. The following year's budget increase was even more dramatic. Between FY 2002 and FY 2003, the anniversary year, the park's allocation nearly doubled, from \$876,500 to \$1.538 million.⁹⁰

The years after the centennial were relatively lean years for the National Park Service and this park in particular, a situation that left Superintendent Larry Blake clearly frustrated. Discussing the period from FY 2004 to FY 2007, Blake stated, "Dayton Aviation's annual allocation of the Operations of the National Park Service budget did not rise at the rate of utility costs or of the salaries of park employees. The park's budget fell from 2004–2005, slightly rebounding in 2006 and rising minimally above the level of 2004 for 2007." In FY 2008, Blake reported, "After assessments, the park retained a base budget of \$1,651,286.89."⁹¹

The frustration continued. In 2011, Superintendent Dean Alexander, who had replaced Blake in 2009, reported, "With a gridlocked Congress unable to reach agreement on much of anything, the park's FY 2011 base budget decreased slightly to \$1,995,427" from an FY 2010 allocation of \$2,042,000.⁹² The park's budget declined each of the next three fiscal years (FY 2012–FY 2014), reflecting the sequestration era that marked the first half of Alexander's superintendency. Since FY 2015, park allocations have hovered around the \$2 million mark, remaining largely stagnant over a six-year period.⁹³

Staffing

Aside from founding superintendent Bill Gibson, the first NPS staff member at Dayton Heritage NHP was Mike Nelson, who served as a seasonal interpretive ranger until November 1996. Nelson had originally been hired by Aviation Trail, Inc. in 1988 to staff the Wright Cycle Company on weekends, when it was open to the public. When the property shifted to NPS oversight, Nelson joined the park service and continued staffing the cycle shop part-time. A second seasonal ranger followed shortly after that. Jerry Kessens began working mostly in the summer season, staffing the cycle shop, which in the early years was

⁹⁰ Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2002," 2; Appendix C; Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2003," 1.

⁹¹ Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2004–2007," 6; Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2008," 3.

⁹² Alexander, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009–2011," 3; Hart's figures (Appendix C) show different dollar amounts but reflect the same trend.

⁹³ Alexander, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP State of the Park Report, FY 2014," 1; Alexander, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP State of the Park Report, FY 2015," 1–2; Appendix C.

the only interpretive space that required a regular NPS presence for visitors, since neither interpretive center had been built yet. Kessens continued as a seasonal employee through the end of the 2003 summer season.⁹⁴

Ann Deines, later Ann Honious, joined the park next. She came to Dayton from Washington, DC, where she had held previous research-based term appointments at the NPS National Capital Regional Office and the Historic American Building Survey/ Historical American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) program. In 1994, she was hired by the Midwest Regional Office. Ron Cockrell, a historian in that office, had submitted a proposal for special funding to the NPS Washington Service Office, History Division, for three term employees to complete historic resource studies at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, Keweenaw NHP, and Brown v. Board of Education NHP. NPS Chief Historian at the time, Edwin Bearrs, approved the funding; Honious was hired and duty-stationed in Dayton, supervised by Cockrell.⁹⁵

At the end of the two-year term appointment, Deines (later Honious) competed for and was hired as Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's permanent historian. She eventually moved into the role of Chief of Education and Resource Management at the park, in 2000. All told, Honious was at the park for fifteen years, 1994–2009.⁹⁶ She left to take a position at Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in Missouri. Her position in Dayton remained open for a number of months before the park hired Noemi “Ami” Ghazala, who had most recently worked for Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve in New Orleans. In 2012, Jewel Haskins Harris moved from Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts, in Virginia, to succeed Ghazala. She remained at the park until 2021.⁹⁷

To a certain extent, Gibson looked to his previous park, Hopewell Culture NHP, to assemble his initial crew at Dayton. Bob Petersen, who had worked with Gibson at Hopewell Culture NHP, became Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's first permanent full-time staff person after Gibson himself, joining the park as an interpretive ranger in October 1995. Petersen remained at the park for twenty-seven years; he retired in April 2022. In a 2016 oral history interview, he described the “make do” nature of working at a young park: “I was doing lots of different things: I shoveled the sidewalks in the winter, I cleaned the

⁹⁴ Gibson, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 1996,” 3–4; Michael Nelson, Oral History, interview by Casey Huegel, May 29, 2015, 1–7, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Bob Petersen, Oral History, interview by Casey Huegel, December 1, 2016, 2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2004–2007.” The discussion that follows, unless otherwise noted, is drawn from Appendix D of this report, which was assembled by Susan Ferentinos, Edward Roach, and Ryan Qualls.

⁹⁵ Ann Honious, Oral History, interview by Susan Ferentinos, August 23, 2021, 1–4, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Ron Cockrell, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

⁹⁶ Honious, 1–4; Cockrell, Comments on Draft 2; Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2000,” 4.

⁹⁷ Lawrence Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2009–2011,” Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park (National Park Service, 2011), 1–2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library Roach, Comments on Draft 2.

toilets, cut the grass, and answered the alarms in the middle of the night, whatever didn't fall under the duties of the superintendent or the historian I basically stepped into."⁹⁸ With Petersen on staff, the park was able to increase operations to five days a week.⁹⁹

Bonnie Murray was also originally assigned to Hopewell Culture NHP, but from the early years of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, she split her time between the two units, serving as an administrative officer of both parks. At first, only 20 percent of her time went to Dayton, but over time that increased to 50 percent.¹⁰⁰ The park's only internal law enforcement also comes from Hopewell Culture NHP. Since 2011, Hopewell Culture NHP law enforcement ranger Keith Gad has been stationed at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, but this arrangement will likely end with Gad's retirement.¹⁰¹

In 2001, Leonard Simpson was hired to oversee the reconstruction of the Hoover Block; he eventually became the park's facilities manager and served until 2010, when he left to become an NPS special projects manager, based in northern Virginia.¹⁰² He was replaced as facilities manager by Necia Alexander (no relation to Dean Alexander), who started as a maintenance mechanic in 2008 and continues to serve as facilities manager as of 2022. Other longtime facilities personnel include maintenance worker Matthew Rucht and Bob Stemple, who was a maintenance worker from 2003 to 2006 and has been the park's facilities management specialist since 2006. Similarly, Steve Moyer served as a utility system operator/repairer from 2003 to 2006 and then held the position of information technology specialist from 2006 to 2014.¹⁰³

In the period between 1995 and 2003, the centennial year, much of the operations of the park were covered by seasonal and student employees to help Petersen with interpretation and Honious with history research. In preparation for the opening of the WDIC and the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center, the park hired Gregg Smith and Julie Frasure as park guides and Arthur Currence as the park's second interpretive ranger. In the words of Honious:

I was hiring staff to operate something that was opening to the fanfare of the Centennial of Flight. And we had no idea how many visitors we'd have, so we thought high on the number of employees, and we didn't want to invest in permanent employees that then obligated against the budget for however long those employees were there. And so, I hired seasonals and mostly student employees from the University of Dayton and Wilberforce [University]. And

⁹⁸ Petersen, Oral History, 2.

⁹⁹ Honious, Comments on Draft 2.

¹⁰⁰ Gibson, "Superintendent's Report, FY 1998," 2.

¹⁰¹ Roach, "RE: Review: Staff."

¹⁰² Alexander, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009–2011," 1–2; Petersen, Comments on Draft 2.

¹⁰³ Georgeff, Oral History I.

that was a decision made to not get the park in—“stuck” is not the right word, but we didn’t want to have staff if what materialized in the operating needs of the park was not what we were projecting.¹⁰⁴

Some of these rangers became long-time park employees. Currence was with the park from 2003 to 2008. Smith moved up the ranks from park guide (2003–8) to visitor use specialist (2008–11) to park ranger (2011–20). Frasure held positions as park guide (2003–8), park ranger (2008–14), and budget analyst (2014–15). Mandy Murray Way (daughter of administrative officer Bonnie Murray) began as a seasonal park guide in 2002 and moved into a permanent park guide position the following year, a position she held until 2011. Later interpretive hires also moved into permanent positions with Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. Ryan Qualls began as a park guide in 2009, became a permanent park ranger in 2011, and became a supervisory ranger in 2014, a position he continues to hold in 2022. Casey Huegel also began as a park guide, in 2012, and after three years (2015) he moved into the resource management division as a museum technician, a full-time position he held while pursuing graduate education in US history. In spring 2022, Huegel earned his PhD while still holding his NPS position.

Eventually, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was also able to hire some administrative staff to work onsite. Samartra Anderson was hired as an administrative assistant in 2000 and continued to work at the park until 2012. After Anderson, Tara Miller-Hunt joined the team as an administrative assistant (2012–16); she was replaced in that position by Tamara L. Moore (2017 to the present). LuAnn Hart worked at the park as a budget analyst from 2015 until her retirement in 2021.¹⁰⁵ Tim Good worked in 2004 and 2005 as the park’s first management assistant; he was replaced in early 2006 by Nicholas Georgeff, who continues in this position as of 2022.¹⁰⁶

Judi Hart (no relation to LuAnn Hart) began working as the park’s education specialist in the centennial year, 2003, a position she held until her retirement in 2015. Edward Roach also began in 2003 as the park historian.¹⁰⁷ Karen Rosga worked under Hart, as an education technician, starting in 2008 and continuing with the park until 2016.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Honious, Oral History.

¹⁰⁵ Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2000,” 4; Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2009–2011,” 18.

¹⁰⁶ Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2004–2007,” 14; Georgeff, Oral History I.

¹⁰⁷ Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2002,” 4.

¹⁰⁸ Roach, Oral History.

Conclusion

Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP has successfully utilized a small staff and a small federal appropriation to manage a multiunit urban partnership park. In this way, it has fulfilled the vision of the partnership park structure, leveraging partnerships to create a larger impact than it would otherwise have. The park has been aided in this effort by four seasoned superintendents, a loyal, long-term staff, and pooling resources with other nearby NPS units.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Cultural Resource Management

According to its enabling legislation and amendments, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park (NHP) is composed of the following properties:

- The “core parcel,” consisting of the Hoover Block and the Aviation Trail/Setzer building (now joined as the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center); the Wright Cycle Company; and two historical structures next to the cycle shop. These structures comprise the addresses 16–30 South Williams Street, Dayton.
- Huffman Prairie Flying Field, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, in Greene County, Ohio
- Paul Laurence Dunbar House, 219 North Summit Street, Dayton
- John W. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers National Museum, housing the 1905 Wright Flyer III, Carillon Historical Park, 1000 Carillon Boulevard, Dayton
- Hawthorn Hill, 901 Harman Avenue, Oakwood, Ohio
- Wright Company factory buildings, off of West Third Street, Dayton¹

Of these properties, the Wright Cycle Company is the park’s only contributing historic resource solely owned and operated by the National Park Service (NPS).² All other properties within the park are managed in collaboration with Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP’s legislated partners: Aviation Trail, Inc. (ATI), Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, the Ohio History Connection, and Dayton History. The Wright Company factory is not yet open to the public and is owned by the city of Dayton.

Overseeing multiple properties through multiple partnerships, each governed by a different cooperative agreement, is arguably the park’s largest cultural resource management challenge. While a more traditional model of national parks entailed NPS ownership and sole management of its cultural resources, the more complicated model of multiple owners, operators, and partnerships is far from rare. It is a hallmark of a newer generation of national park units, which can be described as urban partnership parks. As such, the lessons learned about cultural resource management at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP can provide guidance for other park units in this category.

¹ The Wright Company factory buildings do not have a consistent address, sometimes listed as 2701 Home Avenue and sometimes as 99 Cowart Avenue.

² The Aviation Trail/Setzer Building is the only building in the core parcel that is *not* owned by the park; it is owned by Aviation Trail, Inc. and leased to the park.

This chapter considers each of the cultural resources within the park’s boundaries, providing a history of their management both before and after park establishment. By focusing on each property, individual relationships can be detailed. At the same time, reflecting on all properties together can illuminate general trends and insights. This chapter aims to accomplish both tasks.

The Core Parcel

Pre-Park History

The Hoover Block is named after Zachary T. Hoover, a local business owner who financed the construction of the building in 1890–92, after purchasing the lot in 1884. Hoover owned a drugstore on the northeast corner of West Third Street and South Williams Street and built the Hoover Block across the street, on the southeast corner of this same intersection, to accommodate his store on the ground floor while providing additional commercial space on the second and third floors. The Wright brothers operated their print shop on the second floor of this building from 1890 to 1895. This was the second location for the shop after it moved from the Wright family home in 1889.³

In 1900, Hoover’s son-in-law, Frank B. Hale (who would go on to serve as mayor of Dayton from 1922 to 1926), opened a grocery on the ground floor of the Hoover Block, where it operated until the late 1910s. (The Hale Grocery is recreated in the present-day Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center.) The grocery tradition continued in that space for much of the building’s history. A small Kroger store once occupied this location, as did a Shop-Rite Foods between 1966 and 1980. The building was vacant after Shop-Rite closed in 1980.⁴

Next to the Hoover Block, the Setzer Building (now also referred to as the Aviation Trail Building) was built in 1906. While this was after the period when the Wrights occupied the Hoover Block, the Setzer Building lies within the park boundaries and is now joined internally to the Hoover Block. The combined space is now occupied by the

³ Ann Honious, *What Dreams We Have: The Wright Brothers and Their Hometown of Dayton, Ohio* (Fort Washington, PA: Eastern National, 2003), 53–54; Loren S. Gannon Jr., “West Third Street, Dayton, OH,” National Register of Historic Places District Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1989), 7.2, 8.1, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/71990545>; Aviation Trail, Inc., “Nomination for National Historic Register—Notes” (n.d.), 1–4, folder 9, box 1, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections; Aviation Trail, Inc., “Proposed Development Plan for the Wright Brothers Inner West Enterprise Zone (Draft)” (Dayton, OH: Aviation Trail Inc, March 1982), 10, folder: ATI Reports, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections. Note that Honious states the building was “near completion” in July 1890, when the Wright Brothers opened their building there; the Aviation Trail report lists the building as being built in 1891. This is most likely when the building was fully completed.

⁴ Aviation Trail, Inc., “Proposed Development Plan for the Wright Brothers Inner West Enterprise Zone (Draft),” 10; Edward Roach, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center, the Dave Gold Parachute Museum (operated by Aviation Trail, Inc.), and the administrative offices of both ATI and Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. Although the Setzer Building retains its early-twentieth-century façade, the building itself is a modern construction built at the turn of the twenty-first century after most of the original building collapsed.⁵

Just across the Wright-Dunbar Plaza from the interpretive center, the building at 22 South Williams Street—now known as the Wright Cycle Company building or the cycle shop—was built in 1886. It served as a grocery, feed store, saloon, and boarding house before the Wright brothers leased it for their combination print and cycle shop in 1895. It was at this location that the Wrights began building their own brand of bicycles; this was also where they began considering the possibility of heavier-than-air flight. The brothers ran their business from this spot until 1897. The park also owns the historic structures at 26 and 30 South Williams Street: 26 South Williams houses the administrative offices of the National Aviation Heritage Alliance, a park partner; 30 South Williams houses additional administrative offices for Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP.⁶

Over the years, the association of the Hoover Block and 22 South Williams with the Wright brothers faded from popular memory. It was rediscovered in the early 1980s, when an article written by Fred Fisk and Marlin Todd included a historic photograph of the Wright Cycle Company at this address.⁷ Shortly afterward, Mary Ann Johnson, an early member of ATI, confirmed that this structure and the Hoover Block were still standing while conducting research for her book *A Field Guide to Flight: On the Aviation Trail in Dayton, Ohio*.⁸ ATI ultimately identified six other locations in the neighborhood with

⁵ Gannon Jr., “West Third Street District Nomination,” 7.2; “Parachute Museum,” Aviation Trail, Inc., n.d., <https://www.aviationtrailinc.org/parachute-museum>. The collapse and new construction of the Setzer Building is discussed in Chapter 5, “Park Partners.”

⁶ Gannon Jr., “West Third Street District Nomination,” 2, 6; Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 88, 91–92; Aviation Trail, Inc., “Proposed Development Plan for the Wright Brothers Inner West Enterprise Zone (Draft),” 12; Timothy R. Gaffney, *The Dayton Flight Factory: The Wright Brothers and the Birth of Aviation* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2014), 26–29; Lawrence Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2009–2011,” Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park (National Park Service, 2011), 8, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁷ According to Fred Fisk, Ivonette Miller, niece of the Wright brothers, “told a friend who told Mary Ann Johnson” about the photo and the building after reading Fisk’s article. Fisk takes credit for saving the building. Fred C. Fisk and Marlin W. Todd, *The Wright Brothers: From Bicycle to Biplane* (West Milton, OH: Miami Graphic Services Inc., 1990).

⁸ Mary Ann Johnson, Oral History, interview by Ann Deines, February 21, 1996, 6–7, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Mary Ann Johnson, *A Field Guide to Flight: On the Aviation Trail in Dayton, Ohio* (Dayton, Ohio: Landfall Press, 1996).

connections to the Wright brothers. Even though only the cycle shop at 22 South Williams Street and the Hoover Block at 1060 West Third Street had extant structures, ATI determined the entire neighborhood could be an aviation attraction.⁹

The group wrote a “Proposed Development Plan” in 1982. ATI envisioned 22 South Williams Street and the Hoover Block as the anchor of the Wright Brothers Neighborhood, which in turn would be “the core element of the larger Wright Brothers Inner West Enterprise Zone.” True to their initial economic development goals, ATI hoped the Wright brothers neighborhood would “act as a catalyst for West Side Dayton redevelopment.” In addition to driving economic growth, this designated area would preserve aviation history and historic buildings, draw in other aviation projects and museums, and promote Dayton as the “birthplace of aviation.”¹⁰ Under this plan, ATI would restore the Wright Cycle Company building to look like the Wrights’ shop. The Hoover Block would be restored to include a general store and printing shop. ATI imagined the buildings as the Wright Brothers Museum Complex.¹¹

As detailed in Chapter 3, “The Beginnings of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP,” the city of Dayton was initially skeptical of ATI’s vision and was simultaneously pursuing plans to demolish much of the neighborhood surrounding the cycle shop and the Hoover Block. Some members of ATI shared this skepticism. The group was divided on the question of whether to focus their energies on the two buildings with specific associations with the Wright brothers or to tackle the preservation of the surrounding neighborhood in order to provide historic context.

Those ATI members who supported neighborhood preservation—Gerald “Jerry” Sharkey, C. J. McLin, Brad Tillson, and Walter Rice—working independently from ATI, formed another group, the 2003 Fund Committee, to pursue the goal of neighborhood preservation. The committee decided to pursue a National Register of Historic Places district nomination for the area immediately surrounding the two Wright-associated properties. Loren S. Gannon Jr., an adjunct professor at the University of Dayton, prepared the nomination for the West Third Street Historic District, encompassing the corridor of West Third Street between Shannon and Broadway, with a South Williams Street offshoot

⁹ Johnson, *A Field Guide to Flight*; Jerry Sharkey, Oral History I, interview by Ann Deines, February 16, 1996, 18–22, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Loren S. Gannon, Jr., “West Third Street, Dayton, OH,” National Register of Historic Places District Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1989); Aviation Trail, Inc., “Proposed Development Plan for the Wright Brothers Inner West Enterprise Zone (Draft),” 5.

¹⁰ Aviation Trail, Inc., “Proposed Development Plan for the Wright Brothers Inner West Enterprise Zone (Draft),” 1–2, 5–6.

¹¹ Johnson, Oral History, 15–16; Aviation Trail, Inc., “Proposed Development Plan for the Wright Brothers Inner West Enterprise Zone (Draft),” 22–24. The Proposed Development Plan included plans to develop the other properties in the neighborhood, such as the Wrights’ original home. These sites did not have the actual buildings the Wrights lived and worked in, and therefore required more extensive work, including purchasing the property, hiring architects to design the structures, and actually building them. ATI did not have the funds to accomplish these goals.

that includes the Wright Cycle Company. The district was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1989, under Criterion B, for its association with Orville and Wilbur Wright, and Criterion C, for architecture. A year later, the Wright Cycle Shop was individually designated a National Historic Landmark, the result of a nomination prepared by staff from the NPS Midwest Regional Office.¹²

Meanwhile, ATI had the Wright Cycle Company building and the Hoover Block to focus on. ATI's first task was to clean out the cycle shop, which it did via volunteers and people in the criminal justice system performing public service as part of their sentences. Next, they needed to replace the building's roof, which was leaking. To assist with raising funds, ATI partnered with Macfarlane Middle School in West Dayton. Under the coordination of teacher Judy Haller, students at Macfarlane launched a nationwide fundraising campaign to other schools, offering a shingle from the building's old roof in exchange for a donation. In addition to generating much-needed funds, this partnership strengthened ATI's relationships in the neighborhood. In the words of Jerry Sharkey, "The neighborhood and the kids and others just came, when we had nobody else, [and] kind of supported us. And behind them then came the politicians."¹³

ATI hired an architecture firm that specialized in historic buildings to draw up plans for the cycle shop.¹⁴ Despite the fact that the architectural plans were still in development, restoration of the building began in 1985, with the assistance of \$120,000 from public grants and private donations.¹⁵ Community members, including the Wright brothers' descendants, donated furniture for the first-floor exhibit, and ATI member Roger McClure helped restore a motor similar to one that the Wrights had used in their shop.¹⁶ The finalized exhibit included an interpretation of the cycle shop office. The building opened to the public in 1988, once the rehabilitation of the exterior and first floor had been finished. The entire building was completed in 1992.¹⁷ Once the Wright Cycle Company building opened, ATI operated a museum on the first floor on weekends, staffed by one manager, Mike Nelson, who later became Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's first park ranger, hired on a seasonal basis. Though it never had high numbers of visitors, usually at least one group or person came through a day.¹⁸

¹² Sharkey, Oral History I, 30–33; Gannon Jr., "West Third Street"; Jill O'Bright, David G. Richardson, and William S. Harlow, "Wright Cycle Company and Wright and Wright Printing," National Historic Landmark Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1990), <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/71986526>.

¹³ Sharkey, Oral History I, 13–17, quotation from 17.

¹⁴ Johnson, Oral History, 17.

¹⁵ Aviation Trail, Inc., "Wright Brothers Museum Complex," n.d., folder 20, box 16, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections.

¹⁶ Johnson, Oral History, 20–21.

¹⁷ "Aviation Trail Timeline/Sequence" (n.d.), folder 1, box 1, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections.

¹⁸ Michael Nelson, Oral History, interview by Casey Huegel, May 29, 2015, 7–8, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.



The Wright Cycle Company building at 22 South Williams Street, Dayton, in 1990, after Aviation Trail, Inc. restored it. Image: Gerald Sharkey, NPS Gallery, Asset ID: 9E8E6A1F-1DD8-B71B-0B7F648ECB47291E.

As the cycle shop was nearing completion, ATI turned its attention to the Hoover Block. The architecture firm Gaede, Serne, Zofcin, based in Cleveland, was hired to design plans for the building. The plans were completed in 1987 and were reviewed by NPS historical architect William Harlow in a report issued around 1990.¹⁹ However, work on the Hoover Block was slow to start. In 1990, ATI had secured \$400,000 from the state of Ohio to restore the building. However, the city of Dayton asked ATI to give it \$300,000 in order to “cocoon the two nearby buildings.” Dayton had purchased the buildings with the intent to restore them, in an effort to attract NPS involvement. ATI reluctantly agreed to foot the bill, in service of “the big picture” and their own long-term goal of restoring the neighborhood, even though it meant putting the Hoover Block’s restoration on hold.²⁰

¹⁹ Gaede, Serne, Zofcin Architects Inc., “Master Plan Study for the Hoover Block, Dayton, Ohio” (n.d.), folder 9, box 16, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections; William S. Harlow, “Review of Hoover Block Master Plan,” 1990, folder H3015, box 1, MWRO 62-128, Midwest Regional Office Archives, Lincoln, NE.

²⁰ “Aviation Trail Again Stops Wrecking Ball,” *Dayton Daily News*, October 12, 1990.

In 1995, the 2003 Fund Committee used \$175,000 of the \$2 million it had received in state funds to pay for a structural survey of the building.²¹ ATI did not finish renovating the building before it was transferred to the NPS in 1996.

The final building purchased by ATI, the Setzer Building, partially collapsed in 1992. ATI again lacked the funds to properly rebuild the building. Only the façade of the building was determined to be historically significant and worth saving. As a temporary fix, ATI paid for a support to be built behind the still-intact façade while acquiring the funds to essentially build a new building. Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Superintendent William “Bill” Gibson also requested that ATI wait to draw up plans for the structure until the park’s general management plan was completed. In 1995, ATI hired architect (and ATI member) Stephen Brown to design the outer shell of the building. The project broke ground on November 3, 1995.²²

Since 1990, NPS officials had discussed coordinating the renovation of the interiors of the Setzer Building and the Hoover Block. In his review of the Hoover Block Master Plan, historical architect William Harlow, of the NPS Midwest Regional Office, proposed using the connected Setzer Building to accommodate elevators, restrooms, and new mechanical systems for both buildings. This plan would allow the NPS to comply with the agency’s accessibility requirements without impacting the historical integrity of the Hoover Block. Though there was general interest in the idea that the “two buildings could communicate with each other,” initially they remained separate projects. ATI would oversee the construction of a new Aviation Trail Building, in the location of the Setzer Building, and the NPS would oversee the rehabilitation of the Hoover Block.²³

Superintendent Bill Gibson opposed the NPS taking on “the burden of the Setzer Building,” and especially objected to adding it to the park. Instead, he favored cooperating with ATI. His successor, Lawrence Blake, began discussions with ATI for legally combining the two projects into one facility. In 1999, Blake and George Wedekind Jr., president of ATI, met at the NPS Midwest Regional Office (MWRO) to formalize combining the existing construction contracts. The two groups agreed to a partnership agreement, where the NPS would assume all responsibility for construction and have their Hoover Block architect, Quinn Evans, hire ATI’s architect, Steve Brown, as a subcontractor. ATI would remain the

²¹ Timothy R. Gaffney, “\$2 Million Will Rehab Historic Sites,” *Dayton Daily News*, April 11, 1995.

²² Mary Ann Johnson, “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” (Aviation Trail Inc, October 1996), Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections; The 2003 Fund Committee, “National Park Committee Minutes,” July 20, 1993, 2–3, folder 4, box 19, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections.

²³ Harlow, “Review of Hoover Block Master Plan”; Steve Brown, Oral History, interview by Casey Huegel, January 13, 2016, 7–8, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

owner of the Aviation Trail Building. Work began on both buildings in the fall of 1999.²⁴ As part of the agreement signed between ATI and the NPS, the Aviation Trail Building was added to the boundaries of the park. The addition became official on July 3, 2000, and was formally recognized by Congress with the passage of H.R. 5036 in October of 2000.²⁵

Park Management

As part of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's enabling legislation, ownership of the Wright Cycle Company building and the Hoover Block was transferred to the NPS in 1996, relieving ATI of their care. ATI continued to operate the Wright Cycle Company until 1994, when the park took over operations. ATI also provided office space to the first on-site NPS employees on the second floor of the cycle shop, an area of the building that was not open to the public.²⁶

It is not entirely clear why it took nearly four years after park authorization for the NPS to obtain the core parcel buildings. Most likely, it was simply the slow pace of bureaucracy. Minutes from a meeting of the 2003 Fund Committee Park Subcommittee in November 1992, a month after the park's authorization, state, "Wick [Wilkinson] asked when the NPS might acquire the Bike Shop. Bill G. [Gibson] responded that it might occur in three years; there is no immediate threat."²⁷ Indeed, it was a full year before the NPS had even completed an appraisal of the buildings.²⁸

All the same, even after the transfer of the Wright Cycle Company and the Hoover Block, ATI remained an involved partner, negotiating the terms of a combined visitor center for both the park and the Aviation Trail. The details of this negotiation are covered in Chapter 5, "Park Partners." Known as the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center (WDIC), the space for this purpose would span both the Hoover Block, owned by the NPS, and the

²⁴ William Gibson, Oral History 2007, interview by Ed Roach and Ann Honious, April 17, 2007, 16, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Lawrence Blake to Regional Director, Midwest Region, "Memorandum: Request for Minor Boundary Revision," June 17, 1999, folder 7, box 3, George "JR" Wedekind Jr. Aviation Collection, Wright State University Special Collections; Superintendent, Dayton Aviation Heritage, "Memorandum: Consultation Meeting with MWRO and MWSO Staff Regarding Issues Associated with the Proposal to Combine the Hoover Block and Aviation Trial Building as a Single NPS Project," June 7, 1999, folder 7, box 3, George "JR" Wedekind Jr. Aviation Collection, Wright State University Special Collections; Brown, Oral History, 8.

²⁵ Blake to Regional Director, Midwest Region, "Memorandum: Request for Minor Boundary Revision," June 17, 1999; "Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Amendments Act of 2000, H.R. 5036, 106th Cong.," Pub. L. No. 106-356 (2000), <https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/106/356.pdf>.

²⁶ Johnson, Oral History, 45; National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan" (Denver: US Department of the Interior, 1997), 44.

²⁷ "2003 Fund Committee National Park Sub-Committee Meeting Minutes," November 17, 1992, folder 3, box 19, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections.

²⁸ Daniel Clements, "Appraisal of .45 Acres of Land Including Buildings Located at the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Park," October 25, 1993, "Vertical File: Appraisals of Land" (n.d.), Vertical Files, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

Setzer Building, owned by ATI. Plans for this combined approach did not begin in earnest until 1999. However, the idea of some sort of coordinated renovation of the buildings is evident as early as 1990.²⁹ The park's general management plan, published in 1997, also includes the idea, stating "Both organizations [the NPS and ATI] may consider some shared development" of the Hoover Block and the Setzer Building.³⁰

As part of the planning to renovate the Hoover Block into part of the WDIC, a team of NPS cultural resource specialists—Al O'Bright and William Harlow from MWRO and John Brucksch from the Harpers Ferry Center—visited Dayton in May 2000 to determine what physical evidence remained of the Wrights' print shop that had been in the building from 1890 to 1895. The team reported, "Numerous new findings were discovered. . . that should assist in the accurate placement of walls, doors, and interior window. Pending additional analysis, floor, wall, and ceiling finish treatments should also be fairly accurate." However, the team did note, "Unfortunately, there was little indication of where the Wright printing press and other equipment may have been located."³¹

The design plans for the WDIC were completed in 2000, and the construction contract was awarded to Bruce Construction, of South Vienna, Ohio, in April 2001, with work to be completed within a year. This was an ambitious timeline, but the 2003 Centennial of Flight was fast approaching and served as a hard deadline by which the interpretive center needed to open. Ultimately, the contract had to be extended twice, and the interpretive center did not open until June 2003, mere weeks before the local centennial celebrations.³²

In the aftermath of the centennial, the NPS shifted its attention to the Wright Cycle Company building. Mary Grassick, of the NPS Harpers Ferry Center, completed a historic furnishings report of this building, and although the report was not finalized until 2007, it served as the basis for a new exhibit in the cycle shop that was installed in 2005. Christopher Chadbourne Associates, the same firm that had produced the exhibits in both park visitor centers, designed the new exhibit in the cycle shop as well.³³

²⁹ Harlow, "Review of Hoover Block Master Plan."

³⁰ National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan," 36.

³¹ Al O'Bright to Chief, Cultural Resources, Midwest Region, "Memorandum: Trip Report, Dayton Aviation, April 30–May 5," June 7, 2000, 2, folder H3015, box, 1, MWRO 61-128, Midwest Regional Office Archives, Lincoln, NE.

³² Lawrence Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2000" (National Park Service, 2000), 2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Lawrence Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2001" (National Park Service, 2001), 2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Lawrence Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2003" (National Park Service, 2003), Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

³³ Mary K. Grassick, "Historic Furnishings Report: Print Shop, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, Dayton, Ohio" (Harpers Ferry, WV: National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center, 2007), 4, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/daav/print_shop_hfr.pdf.

Huffman Prairie Flying Field

Pre-Park History

Huffman Prairie Flying Field, in Greene County, Ohio, was the location of the Wright brothers' flight that proved the practicality and potential of their invention. After the first successful flight, in North Carolina in December 1903, the Wrights returned to Dayton, where they continued experimenting. In the words of aviation journalist Timothy Gaffney: "They still had much to learn about how to make a practical flying machine, let alone how to fly it. But with a powered machine, at least they no longer needed to mount an expedition to Kitty Hawk in order to test an idea. All they needed was a big field free of obstructions. Torrence Huffman, president of the Fourth National Bank and a family friend, agreed to let them use Huffman Prairie, part of an old family farm then worked by tenant farmer David C. Beard."³⁴

According to the site's National Historic Landmark documentation, "it was at Huffman Field in 1904 and 1905 that the Wrights continued their quest to conquer the air and developed the world's first practical airplane. At Huffman Field, the Wrights perfected the technique of flying and developed a powered airplane completely controllable by the pilot; able to bank, turn, circle, and make figure eights; withstand repeated take-offs and landings; and remain airborne trouble-free for more than half an hour."³⁵

In May 1910, Huffman Prairie became the permanent location for the Wright School of Aviation, which trained 119 people to fly during its years of operation at this site, 1910–16. The Wright students were primarily civilians, although some military officers also attended the school. Three were women, the rest men. And nearly a third of the students were Canadian, most seeking to qualify for the Royal Flying Corps or the Royal Naval Air Force.³⁶

³⁴ Gaffney, *Dayton Flight Factory*, 60; see also, Jill O'Bright, David G. Richardson, and William S. Harlow, "Huffman Prairie Flying Field," National Historic Landmark Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1990) 8.2–8.6; a full account of Huffman Prairie's history can be found in Elizabeth Fraterrigo et al., *From Pasture to Runway: Huffman Prairie Flying Field, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Cultural Landscape Report, Landscape Implementation Plan, Interpretation Plan* (Omaha: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2002), 3–50.

³⁵ O'Bright, Richardson, and Harlow, "Huffman Prairie Flying Field," 8.1.

³⁶ O'Bright, Richardson, and Harlow, 8.7–8.8; Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 165–68; Lois E. Walker and Shelby E. Wickam, *From Huffman Prairie to the Moon: The History of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base* (Washington, DC: Air Force Logistics Command, 1986), 14; Edward J. Roach, *The Wright Company: From Invention to Industry* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014), 89–91.

The field was also the site where the Wright Company tested new airplane models. During the 1910–16 period, test flights of the Wright Model B, Model R, Model EX, Model C, and Model E took place at the flying field. In November 1910, the Wright Company flew the first-ever commercial air-freight flight from Huffman Prairie to Columbus, Ohio, demonstrating one facet of the airplane’s economic potential.³⁷

In addition to serving as the site for test flights and housing the flying school, Huffman Prairie was also the home base for the short-lived Wright Company exhibitions department, which operated between 1910 and 1911. The exhibitions department, headed by aviator Roy Knabenshue, was a traveling team of pilots who performed at air shows, advertising the allure of aviation and the capabilities of Wright Company planes. When not performing, the team worked out of a hangar at Huffman Prairie Flying Field, where the planes were also stored. Although the exhibitions team turned a significant profit for the company, exhibition flying was a dangerous enterprise. Two Wright Company exhibition pilots, Archibald Hoxsey and Ralph Johnstone, died in separate airplane accidents in 1910, and the company shuttered the exhibitions department in autumn 1911.³⁸

With the US entry into World War I in 1917, Huffman Prairie Flying Field became part of Wilbur Wright Field, established by the US Army Signal Corps to train flight personnel. It was one of the military’s four largest aviation training sites and was home to 1,700 employees. Although the site continued to operate as a flying field, the field’s training function was terminated at the end of the First World War. Throughout the interwar period and World War II, Wright Field was dedicated to advances in engineering. According to historians Lois Walker and Shelby Wickam, “Wright Field engineers and logisticians explored the concepts that provided the impetus for today’s modern Air Force, and guided the technical development of aeronautical equipment that was at the time the most sophisticated in the world.” An adjacent tract of land, Fairfield Aviation General Supply Depot, focused its mission on aeronautical logistics. A third stretch of land, McCook Field, served as an Army Signals Corps research facility. In 1931, the War Department combined parts of Wright Field and Fairfield Air Depot to create Patterson Field.³⁹

In 1947, the US Air Force became a separate branch of the military, breaking off from the US Army. The various military lands in Dayton transferred to the air force, which merged them in 1948 to form Wright-Patterson Air Force Base (AFB). Huffman Prairie has

³⁷ O’Bright, Richardson, and Harlow, “Huffman Prairie Flying Field,” 8.7–8.8; Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 165–68.

³⁸ O’Bright, Richardson, and Harlow, “Huffman Prairie Flying Field,” 8.6–8.7; Roach, *The Wright Company*, 71–76.

³⁹ Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 201–12; O’Bright, Richardson, and Harlow, “Wright Cycle Company,” 8.8–8.9; Elizabeth Fraterrigo et al., *From Pasture to Runway: Huffman Prairie Flying Field, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Cultural Landscape Report, Landscape Implementation Plan, Interpretation Plan* (Omaha: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2002), 36–44; Lois E. Walker and Shelby E. Wickam, *From Huffman Prairie to the Moon: The History of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base* (Washington, DC: Air Force Logistics Command, 1986), 25–30, quotation from 117.

been located within the grounds of Wright-Patterson AFB ever since.⁴⁰ However, the prairie is also located within the jurisdiction of the Miami Conservancy District, established in the aftermath of Dayton's devastating 1913 flood. The conservancy district set up a series of flood-control dams on area waterways, making Huffman Prairie Flying Field (HPFF) part of a potential floodplain. As such, the air force would need approval from the conservancy district before building any permanent structures at HPFF. These circumstances prevented the air force from ever building over the historically significant field. However, various structures of a less permanent nature have existed on the field at various times. According to the HPFF cultural landscape report, "In the mid-1950s—and throughout the 1960s—the flying field's position at the end of the flight line [where planes are stored and serviced] made it a useful site to place facilities used for air navigation and the testing of new instrumentation and navigation systems."⁴¹ Nevertheless, because of the floodplain stipulation and because, until 2002, visitors had to go through base security to access the field, both the local Wright Brothers Memorial and the HPFF Interpretive Center are about a mile away, on a hill overlooking the field.

Huffman Prairie Flying Field was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1971; its nomination was written by Myron R. Brown. The author was affiliated with the Kettering Museum and Historical Society (a defunct organization whose collection is now part of Dayton History), and at the time of the nomination, he was also serving as regional chair of the Ohio Association of Historical Societies. The nomination (using an early-1970s version of the form) argued for significance in the areas of engineering, invention, and military history and assigned a period of significance of 1904–10.⁴²

The flying field became a National Historic Landmark (NHL) in 1990, through a nomination written by Jill O'Bright, David G. Richardson, and William Harlow, all employees of the NPS Midwest Regional Office, as part of their investigations into a possible park unit in Dayton. According to the NHL documentation, the site is nationally significant under criterion 1, association with events that have made a significant contribution to US history, and criterion 2, association with people who are significant to US history.⁴³

⁴⁰ Fraterrigo et al., *From Pasture to Runway*, 2002, 5.

⁴¹ Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 211–12; Roach, *The Wright Company*, 102; Fraterrigo et al., *From Pasture to Runway*, 2002, 49–52, quotation 50.

⁴² Myron R. Brown, "Huffman Prairie Flying Field," National Register of Historic Places Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1971), <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/71988758>.

⁴³ O'Bright, Richardson, and Harlow, "Huffman Prairie Flying Field."

Park Management

Huffman Prairie Flying Field was included in Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP from its authorization in 1992. The enabling legislation tasked the park with providing interpretation of the field from Wright Brothers Hill, a directive that ultimately led to the construction of the park's Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center at that location. Wright Brothers Hill, also located on Wright-Patterson AFB land, is a summit overlooking the field and is the site of the local Wright Brothers Memorial. NPS involvement in Wright Brothers Hill is discussed in the next subsection.⁴⁴

When the park was authorized, Huffman Prairie Flying Field contained a memorial pylon, erected in 1941 to mark the approximate site of takeoff for the Wright brothers' first flight at Huffman Prairie in 1904. The field also had a replica of the Wright brothers' 1905 hangar. The US Army Construction Engineering Research Laboratories had constructed the replica two years before, in 1990, in preparation for the NHL dedication of the field, held later that year. This hangar still stands.⁴⁵ In 1990, HPPF was in the secured area of the air force base, because of its proximity to the base's flight line. However, after the site was designated as an NHL, and in anticipation of the passage of the Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP enabling legislation, Wright-Patterson AFB developed a visitor pass procedure to allow the public to visit the site. The base opened the field to the public in 1991, although visitors still had to stop at a security checkpoint and receive a visitor's pass. As part of the effort to introduce the public to the site, a local Eagle Scout candidate, Samuel Berrios Jr., developed a historical walking tour of the field.⁴⁶

After the park's authorization in 1992, a few small improvements were made to the site. By 1996, access roads had been improved and a parking area had been designated, allowing for up to twenty-two cars and three busses.⁴⁷ And in 1993–94, another Eagle Scout candidate built a representation of the Wrights' catapult launch tower and rail.⁴⁸ In the mid-1990s, the Wright-Patterson AFB Office of Environmental Management, which is responsible for cultural resources on the base, did a series of archeological investigations of

⁴⁴ "Public Law 102-419: To Establish the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park" (1992), 102, <https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/102/419.pdf>; Tom Thomas and Karen Vaage, "Wright Brothers Hill Cultural Landscape Report (CLR)" (Dayton, OH: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, September 1997), 1.

⁴⁵ National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan," 48; Adam Weiwel, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

⁴⁶ Jan Ferguson, Oral History, interview by Casey Huegel, August 5, 2015, 3–4, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Samuel Berrios Jr., "Wright Brothers Historical Walking Trail, Huffman Prairie Flying Field," 1991, in "Vertical File: Huffman Prairie 1905 Flight, Misc." (n.d.), Vertical Files, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁴⁷ William Gibson, "Superintendent's Report, FY 1996" (Dayton: National Park Service, 1996), 2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁴⁸ National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan," 48.

the flying field. A dig in 1994 revealed the remnants of the 1910 hangar that housed the Wright Flying School and Wright Company exhibitions department. It also uncovered physical evidence of the old Simms Road, which ran parallel to the interurban rail line the brothers took to access the flying field.⁴⁹

A cultural landscape report of Huffman Prairie Flying Field was initiated in 1998, under the direction of the NPS Midwest Regional Office. While it was underway, the park and the air force base continued to make improvements to the site in anticipation of the 2003 Centennial of Flight. In 2001, a permanent parking lot was built, and more road improvements were completed. Then the September 11, 2001, attacks took place, and Wright-Patterson AFB was closed to the public until further notice.⁵⁰

While the base was closed in the aftermath of 9/11, the air force, in consultation with the park, removed Huffman Prairie from the secured part of Wright-Patterson AFB. The field was physically separated from the secure zone by the construction of a fence. These measures allowed HPFF to reopen to the public on December 17, 2002, the ninety-ninth anniversary of the first flight and the official start of the centennial year.⁵¹ Some work on the field continued, and HPFF's rededication ceremony took place in July 2003, during the height of centennial festivities in Dayton.⁵² The year 2005 marked the centennial of the first practical flight, which occurred at HPFF. The anniversary led to additional improvements at the flying field. A connector running under Ohio Route 444 (which runs between Wright Brothers Hill and the flying field) was built so that bicyclists could safely travel between the two cultural sites.⁵³

In 2002, the HPFF cultural landscape report (CLR), began in 1998, was completed. The final report combined the CLR with a landscape implementation plan and an interpretive plan for the flying field. It was prepared by a team of NPS employees: Elizabeth Fraterrigo (Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP); Marla McEnaney and Tom Richter (NPS Midwest Regional Office); and H. Eliot Foulds (NPS Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation), who had been involved in the CLR for Wright Brothers Hill a few years earlier.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Ferguson, Oral History, 5–6; News Release, US Air Force, PAM #95-009, February 15, 1995, in “Vertical File: Huffman Prairie 1905 Flight, Misc.”

⁵⁰ William Gibson, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 1998” (Dayton: National Park Service, 1998), 4, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2001,” 4; Lawrence Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2002” (National Park Service, 2002), 4, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁵¹ Ferguson, Oral History, 3–4; Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2003,” 4.

⁵² Ferguson, Oral History, 17.

⁵³ Lawrence Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2004–2007” (National Park Service, 2007), 15, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁵⁴ Fraterrigo et al., *From Pasture to Runway*, 2002.

The report recommended a treatment plan that would create a “symbolic landscape” covering the period of 1904–16, including both the era when the brothers were using the field to perfect the art of flight and the era when the Wright Company used the field for training, experimentation, and exhibitions. The treatment plan also allowed for the preservation of resources and for the highest level of visitor access to the site. In the words of its authors: “The objective of this alternative is to convey both historic periods without adding literal reconstructions in such a way that archeology and historic views are minimally impacted. Simple design elements will be added to allude to the flying field’s historic agricultural character, symbolize where the Wrights’ hangars were located, and indicate how they used the site.”⁵⁵

In 2008, Wright-Patterson AFB and Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP signed an agreement to build a storage facility adjacent to HPFF. The primary purpose of the facility was to house Wright “B” Flyer Inc.’s Valentine Flyer close to the field, where it was used for interpretive purposes in the summer months. The storage unit cost \$675,000 to construct and was completed in 2010. However, because of the expense of exhibiting the Valentine Flyer, the park no longer uses the plane in interpretation, and it is no longer stored at HPFF.⁵⁶

Archeological investigation has continued on the field. In 2018, the NPS Midwest Archeological Center, based in Lincoln, Nebraska, began a remote sensing survey in an effort to determine, among other things, the location of the original catapult and the 1904 hangar. This survey work continued in 2021; both efforts were led by NPS archeologist Adam Weiwel.⁵⁷ In another recent improvement, after many years of negotiation, a permanent wheelchair-accessible restroom was added to the site.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Fraterrigo et al., 85.

⁵⁶ Lawrence Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2008” (National Park Service, 2008), 7, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2009–2011,” 17.

⁵⁷ Paul Woodruff, Oral History, interview by Susan Ferentinos, October 15, 2021, 6, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library Adam Weiwel, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

⁵⁸ Woodruff, 10.



Dedication of the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Ohio Historical Marker, July 16, 2003.
The two people in National Park Service uniforms are Larry Blake (left) and Ann Honious (right).
Image: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

Wright Brothers Hill and the Wright Brothers Memorial

Because Huffman Prairie Flying Field is in a floodplain, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's enabling legislation instructed the park to interpret the field from Wright Brothers Hill, which overlooks the flying field. The hill is the site of the local Wright Brothers Memorial, completed in 1940 through the efforts of local citizens. Edward Deeds, chair of the board of National Cash Register Company in the 1930s, headed the memorial commission. He was also a close friend of Orville Wright and the creator of Carillon Historical Park.

Efforts to memorialize the Wrights in Dayton began as early as 1910 and only accelerated after Wilbur Wright's death in 1912. The original plan was to engage sculptor Gutzon Borglum (who would go on to sculpt Mount Rushmore) to build a memorial statue and the Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm to design the surrounding environment. The memorial was to be placed within Huffman Prairie.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Fraterrigo et al., *From Pasture to Runway*, 2002, 34–35; Thomas and Vaage, "Wright Brothers Hill CLR," 9–11.

However, these memorial plans were put on hold by the Dayton Flood of 1913, while the commission turned its attention to helping victims of the disaster. At the same time, municipal improvements in flood control, undertaken in the aftermath of the event, included the construction of Huffman Dam, which would use Huffman Prairie as a basin for flood overflow, thus rendering the flying field an unsuitable place for the memorial. Memorialization efforts resumed in 1922, and a hilltop overlooking the prairie was selected as the site for a memorial. The Miami Conservancy District, which owned the land, and the Wilbur and Orville Wright Memorial Commission worked together to raise the \$129,000 needed to construct the memorial and surrounding landscape.⁶⁰

The memorial grounds were designed by the Olmsted Brothers, one of the nation's foremost landscape architecture firms, run by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and John Charles Olmsted, the sons of Frederick Law Olmsted. The property is one of forty-seven Olmsted Brothers designs built in Dayton, the most of any US city besides New York and Boston. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), including an African American CCC unit stationed at nearby Vandalia, built the monument over the period 1938–40, and it was dedicated in August 1940 in a ceremony attended by Orville Wright.⁶¹ In 1978, the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Wright brothers' first flight, the Miami Conservancy District deeded Wright Brothers Hill to the US Air Force, on the condition that the memorial remain open to the public.⁶²

The memorial does not fall within the boundaries of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, but the NPS has provided technical assistance to the site along the way. In 1997, Tom Thomas and Karen Vaage, working out of the NPS Denver Service Center, prepared a cultural landscape report (CLR) of the hill, as part of the NPS's planning process for interpreting Huffman Prairie Flying Field from that site. Although the hill had been listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 for the Early Woodland-period burial mounds located there, the CLR provided an updated statement of significance, arguing for separate local historical significance based on the hill's association with local aviation sites and as an example of the work of the Olmsted brothers' landscape design. Most recently amended in 2016, the National Register documentation for the hill now lists its areas of significance as landscape architecture and entertainment/recreation.⁶³

⁶⁰ Fraterrigo et al., *From Pasture to Runway*, 2002, 35. For more on the creation of the Miami Conservancy District, see Judith Sealander, *Grand Plans: Business Progressivism and Social Change in Ohio's Miami Valley, 1890–1929*, electronic resource (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988).

⁶¹ Fraterrigo et al., *From Pasture to Runway*, 2002, 34–35; Thomas and Vaage, "Wright Brothers Hill CLR," 9–11; 22–23. It should be noted, however, that the Wright Brothers Hill lies outside Dayton's city limits.

⁶² Thomas and Vaage, "Wright Brothers Hill CLR," 27.

⁶³ Thomas and Vaage, 1–2, 41; H. Eliot Foulds and Joseph H. Crystal, "Wright Brothers Hill Cultural Landscape Report: Treatment Plan for Landscape and Associated Features" (Dayton, OH: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, May 1998), 4, National Park Service Electronic Technical Information Center, <https://pubs.nps.gov/>; Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2002."

Simultaneously to the CLR, the NPS was also working on a treatment plan for the site; it was released the following year (1998). The report was commissioned by the US Air Force, with work being completed by the NPS Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, represented by H. Eliot Foulds, and the NPS Denver Service Center, represented by Joseph H. Crystal. This plan recommended rehabilitating the Wright Brothers Memorial, preserving the elements of the site that contributed to its historical significance and integrity while making some alterations that would keep it compatible with contemporary usage.⁶⁴ The report also outlined Wright-Patterson AFB's Office of Environmental Management's plans to undertake rehabilitation in three phases, in order of priority, with the ultimate goal of having the site rehabilitated and open to visitors in time for the 2003 Centennial of Flight.⁶⁵ Work must have progressed more quickly than expected, however. In his 1998 Superintendent's Report, Superintendent William Gibson announced that the rehabilitation was complete and that a rededication ceremony had taken place in August 1998, mere months after the release of the treatment plan.⁶⁶

The enabling legislation's mandate to interpret Huffman Prairie from Wright Brothers Hill was realized with the construction of the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center (also known as the East Interpretive Center in early park planning documents), located on land adjacent to the local Wright Brothers Memorial. Groundbreaking for the building took place in May 2000.⁶⁷ The building (though not its interpretive exhibits) was completed in July 2002 and briefly opened to the public in August 2002 for a sneak peek before closing again for exhibit installation. The Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center (HPFFIC) was dedicated and officially opened to the public on December 17, 2002. NPS Director Fran Mainella attended the dedication ceremony.⁶⁸

As part of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's agreement with Wright-Patterson AFB, the air force is responsible for maintenance of the resources on Wright Brothers Hill, including the interpretive center building, while the park is responsible for interpretive programs and staffing. The development of the interpretive center's exhibits is discussed in Chapter 9, "Interpretation and Education."⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Foulds and Crystal, "Wright Brothers Hill Treatment Plan," 6-7.

⁶⁵ Foulds and Crystal, 37.

⁶⁶ Gibson, "Superintendent's Report, FY 1998," 4.

⁶⁷ Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2000," 4.

⁶⁸ Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2002," 4; Blake, 4.

⁶⁹ Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009-2011," 12.

Paul Laurence Dunbar House

Pre-Park History

American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar was born in Dayton, in his grandmother's house east of the Great Miami River, in 1872. His parents had both lived in slavery, and his father was also a Civil War veteran. They married in Dayton in 1871. Dunbar grew up in East Dayton and attended segregated schools until 1884, when the city announced plans to integrate its educational system in an effort to reduce the cost of maintaining separate schools. His family moved to West Dayton while he was attending Central High School, which had a racially mixed student body. He graduated in 1891, a significant achievement, as only a small number of African Americans in this era received a high school diploma. Orville Wright had been in his same grade at Central High School, although Orville did not graduate. Dunbar himself delayed his graduation by a year, from 1890 to 1891, while he was working on his newspaper, the *Dayton Tattler*, the newspaper that was printed at the Wright brothers' print shop.⁷⁰

Between 1891 and 1898, Dunbar worked numerous jobs, both in and outside of Dayton, to support himself and his mother, Matilda. At the same time, he was publishing volumes of poetry, and his reputation as a poet was growing. By 1898, he had reached a level of acclaim where he could focus on being a poet, earning a living through his publications and public readings. He married fellow writer Alice Moore (best known by her later literary name, Alice Dunbar Nelson) in 1898, but Dunbar proved to be abusive, and Alice left him four years later. Also during this period, Dunbar became increasingly dependent on alcohol and suffered increasing health problems, including tuberculosis and dramatic mood swings.⁷¹

Dunbar and his mother returned to Dayton in 1903, and he bought the house at 219 North Summit Street in 1904, placing it in his mother's name. Dunbar was gravely ill during most of the time he resided in this house. However, he continued to write as much as he was able to. Dunbar died in February 1906, at the age of thirty-three. His mother continued to live in this house until her own death in 1934.⁷²

⁷⁰ Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 56–65; STRATA Architecture Inc., “Paul Laurence Dunbar House Cultural Landscape and Historic Structures Report [CLR/HSR], Volume 1” (Dayton: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, 2019), 2.19–2.20, <http://www.npshistory.com/publications/daav/clr-hsr-dunbar-house-v1.pdf>; Bob Petersen, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

⁷¹ Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 65–73; Paula J. Giddings, “Lives of the Poets,” *New York Times*, August 18, 2002, sec. Books, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/18/books/lives-of-the-poets.html>.

⁷² Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 73–75; Joseph S. Mendinghall, “Paul Laurence Dunbar House, Dayton, OH,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1977), 5. For a detailed history of the house itself, see STRATA Architecture Inc., “Dunbar House CLR/HSR, v. 1,” 2.8–2.18.

Dunbar was buried in Woodland Cemetery, and in 1909 the Paul Laurence Dunbar Memorial Association erected a small statue and planted a willow tree at the gravesite. When Dunbar's mother died in 1934, she bequeathed the house on Summit Street to her son Robert Murphy, Paul's half-brother. In 1936, the state of Ohio acquired the house and established the Paul Laurence Dunbar State Memorial and Museum. The Dunbar House was the first state-operated historic site in the United States dedicated to African American history.⁷³

At this time, the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society (later the Ohio Historical Society and now the Ohio History Connection) oversaw state historic sites. The Ohio Historical Society (OHS) opened the house to the public in 1938. At the time of the transfer to the OHS, most of the furnishings in the house were contemporary to Dunbar's lifetime, and his library remained intact, at his mother's request. Although some furnishings were replaced over the years, the 1997 Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP general management plan notes that "three key rooms of the house—Paul Laurence's study, his bedroom, and the family living room or front parlor—still contain almost entirely original furnishings."⁷⁴

Minimal records exist from the early decades of the site's existence as a historic site, but surviving evidence indicates that it was not a high priority among the OHS's collection of historic sites. A 1963 letter from Charles Pratt of the OHS to Herbert Kahler, NPS Chief Historian, declared, "This past year our operation at this site has been on a minimum basis, and as it now appears, the house will not be open for public visitation before July 1st, and possibly not then." Likewise, a 1977 Landmark Visit Report written by Fahy C. Whitaker, Superintendent of the William Howard Taft National Historic Site, conveyed that the house "is not high on the Ohio Hist. Society funding list because it's [*sic*] visitation (1,708 last year) does not compare to other State areas."⁷⁵ By the late 1970s, the house had fallen into significant disrepair. "The house was musty, and the books in the library and Dunbar's clothing in the closet were on the verge of deterioration." A private club had formed to solicit funds for the site's upkeep.⁷⁶

Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall designated the house a National Historic Landmark (NHL) in the final days of 1962. The NHL program was still in its infancy at this point, having only been created in 1960 by NPS Director Conrad Wirth. However, actual NHL documentation—as we understand the term today, involving a standardized form—was not approved for the Dunbar House until 1977. At the time of its original designation in 1962,

⁷³ Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 75–77; Mendinghall, "Paul Laurence Dunbar House," 5; National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan," 45.

⁷⁴ Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 75–77; National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan," 45.

⁷⁵ Charles Pratt to Henry Kahler, February 19, 1963; Fahy C. Whitaker, Landmark Visit Report to Paul Laurence Dunbar House (1977), p. 3; both appended to Mendinghall, "Paul Laurence Dunbar House."

⁷⁶ STRATA Architecture Inc., "Dunbar House CLR/HSR, v. 1," 4.10.

the OHS declined to purchase the standard bronze plaque used to mark NHLs in that era. They cited lack of funds and low visitation at the site as the reason for their decision, suggesting once again that the Dunbar memorial was not a high priority for the organization.⁷⁷

By the early 1980s, however, the house was in such bad shape that emergency action was needed. The Historic American Building Survey documented the house in 1981, and that same year the Ohio General Assembly approved funds to repair the house; however, these funds were not released. In 1984, Olivia Smith, president of the Paul Laurence Dunbar Association Inc., publicly stated that “without some immediate repairs, the house probably would not survive.”⁷⁸ The general assembly again approved funding, and between 1984 and 1987, the Dunbar House received both emergency repairs and an interior renovation.⁷⁹



The Paul Laurence Dunbar House in Dayton, Ohio. Image: Tom Engberg, NPS Media Gallery.

⁷⁷ Mendinghall, “Paul Laurence Dunbar House” and accompanying documentation; Geoffrey Burt, “Roots of the National Historic Landmarks Program,” National Park Service, 2014, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/roots-of-the-national-historic-landmarks-program.htm>.

⁷⁸ STRATA Architecture Inc., “Dunbar House CLR/HSR, v. 1,” 4.10–4.11, quotation on 4.11.

⁷⁹ STRATA Architecture Inc., 4.11–4.14.

Park Management

Paul Laurence Dunbar was a contemporary of the Wright brothers in Dayton, went to high school with Orville Wright, and was a customer of the Wrights' printing business. These were some of the reasons that the Dunbar House was included in the enabling legislation of what was essentially a park dedicated to the history of aviation. In addition, the inclusion of the house in Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP had widespread community support. As detailed in Chapter 3, "The Beginnings of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP," the 2003 Fund Committee, in particular, advocated for inclusion, preparing a 1992 briefing statement entitled "Reasons to Include the Paul Laurence Dunbar House State Memorial in the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park."⁸⁰

By the time it became part of the park, the Dunbar State Memorial consisted of two acres and five buildings: the Dunbar House, two neighboring houses, a visitor's center, and an urban barn that dated to Dunbar's residency. After years of neglect, the house had recently undergone some repairs, in the mid-1980s. In the mid-1990s, when Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was in its development stage, rehabilitation began on the two neighboring houses—the Cole and Mundage Houses—with the plan that they would be used for staff offices, a Dunbar library, and an interpretive exhibit. This later effort was funded with Ohio Capital Improvement Funds, with assistance from the 2003 Fund Committee, Central State University, and the OHS. Renovations were completed in 1998.⁸¹

In 1999, the OHS received a Save America's Treasures grant, which presumably funded the bulk of the work undertaken in the early 2000s.⁸² Additional work on the interior of the Dunbar House was undertaken in 2001–3. Reproduction wallpaper was added, and furniture was reupholstered. The house visitor center was expanded and renovated. A new roof was also added, and the barn was refurbished. Somewhat mysteriously, the OHS completed a historic structure report in 2003, at the tail end of the

⁸⁰ Ellen Belcher, "Don't Leave Dunbar Out of Park Bill," *Dayton Daily News*, June 25, 1992; 2003 Fund Committee, "Reasons to Include the Paul Laurence Dunbar House State Memorial in the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park," May 19, 1992, folder 4, box 343, Senate Papers, John H. Glenn Archives, Ohio State University.

⁸¹ "Briefing Statement" (March 18, 1999), folder 32, box 1, Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Gibson, "Superintendent's Report, FY 1996," 1–2; Gibson, "Superintendent's Report, FY 1998," 4; Derek Ali, "Dunbar Complex Renovation Set," *Dayton Daily News*, March 11, 1996; National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan," 37, 46.

⁸² STRATA Architecture Inc., "Paul Laurence Dunbar House Cultural Landscape and Historic Structures Report [CLR/HSR], Volume 2" (Dayton: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, 2019), 5.5–5.6, <http://www.npshistory.com/publications/daav/clr-hsr-dunbar-house-v1.pdf>.

renovation, and a draft historic furnishings report in 2004, the year after the renovation was completed. Normally such documents are created in advance of renovation.⁸³ An exterior lift was added to the Dunbar visitor center in 2005–6.⁸⁴

In 2019, STRATA Architecture Inc, out of Kansas City, Missouri, completed a comprehensive two-volume cultural landscape and historic structures report commissioned by the National Park Service. Volume 1 of this report provided details on the house’s history, modifications, and repairs. Volume 2 outlined treatment plans for the structures and landscape. The report recommended a rehabilitation approach to both the cultural landscape and the historic structures. Rehabilitation, the report argued, would retain the most historically significant features while allowing for increased accessibility and safety.⁸⁵

John W. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers National Museum/1905 Wright Flyer III

Pre-Park History

After achieving flight in Kitty Hawk in 1903, the Wright brothers continued to perfect their invention. At Huffman Prairie in 1905, using their third model (now known as the Wright Flyer III), the brothers achieved their longest sustained flight, staying airborne for thirty-nine minutes and only landing when the plane was running low on fuel. This was the accomplishment that lends the most historical significance to Huffman Prairie Flying Field and is also the reason the 1905 Wright Flyer III is itself a National Historic Landmark.⁸⁶

The Wright Flyer III represented an improvement in design. In the words of aviation journalist Timothy Gaffney: “Unlike the stubby 1903 and ’04 flyers, the 1905 machine is a sculpture of flight. Its balanced proportions and upward sweeping lines make it seem eager to fly. But its elegant design is merely a byproduct of form following function.”⁸⁷

As the Wrights continued to expand on their invention, the Wright Flyer III was disassembled and left in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, where the Wrights had last flown it. In the 1940s, Edward Deeds, a friend of Orville’s and chairman of the board of National Cash Register (NCR), embarked on the creation of Carillon Historical Park and approached Orville about displaying the 1905 flyer there. Orville agreed, and Carl Beust,

⁸³ STRATA Architecture Inc., “Dunbar House CLR/HSR, v. 1,” 4.22–4.23; Bob Petersen, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

⁸⁴ Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2004–2007,” 14.

⁸⁵ STRATA Architecture Inc., “Dunbar House CLR/HSR, v. 2,” 6.1, 7.2.

⁸⁶ Gaffney, *Dayton Flight Factory*, 71; Jill O’Bright, David G. Richardson, and William S. Harlow, “Wright Flyer III,” National Historic Landmark Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1990).

⁸⁷ Gaffney, *Dayton Flight Factory*, 67.

head of the NCR patent department, set to work locating the various pieces of the plane.⁸⁸ It proved to be an effort spanning multiple regions of the country. The flyer's airframe was sitting in storage at the Berkshire Museum in Massachusetts; various small parts were scattered among the residents of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, who had kept them as souvenirs. And Orville himself supplied the engine, minus the crankshaft and flywheel.⁸⁹ Beust eventually found enough original parts to reconstruct the plane, and in the final years of his life, "Orville meticulously supervised the aircraft's reconstruction and helped design the exhibit building."⁹⁰

In 1990, as part of the NPS's exploration of the aviation resources in Dayton, staff from the NPS Midwest Regional Office—Jill O'Bright, David G. Richardson, and William S. Harlow—completed a National Historic Landmark nomination for the flyer. When it was designated that same year, it became the only aircraft to be listed as an NHL.

After the flyer was designated as an NHL, Carillon Historical Park received a conservation assessment grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and some preliminary repairs—such as replacing missing roof tiles and caulking cracks to the foundation—were undertaken on the flyer's exhibit space, known as Wright Hall. The flyer and its exhibit hall were included in the original legislation enabling Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Mr. and Mrs. Wright Miller, *The Wrights' Time to Fly: The Family Remembers*, Part I, interview by Mary Lou Sharkey, 1985, 12–13, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Jill O'Bright et al., "Hawthorn Hill, Dayton, OH," National Historic Landmark Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1990), 13, including quotation; National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan," 46.

⁸⁹ Jeanne Palermo, "Restoration, Preservation, and Conservation of the 1905 Wright Flyer III," *CRM Journal*, no. 2 (2000): 16–17.

⁹⁰ O'Bright, Richardson, and Harlow, "Wright Flyer III NHL Nomination," 13.

⁹¹ O'Bright, Richardson, and Harlow, "Wright Flyer III NHL Nomination"; Palermo, "Restoration, Preservation, and Conservation of the 1905 Wright Flyer III," 18; Gaffney, *Dayton Flight Factory*, 67; Public Law 102-419: To establish the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.



Wright Flyer III, at Carillon Historical Park, in 1990 before Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park was established. Image: Gerald Sharkey, NPS Media Gallery.

Park Management

One of the park's first cultural resource management projects was to provide technical assistance for a rehabilitation of the Wright brothers elements at Carillon Historical Park, which began in 1993 and continued for nearly a decade. NPS staff at the park and regional level and from the Harpers Ferry Center worked with Carillon Historical Park staff to plan a rehabilitation that would provide environmental monitoring and security for the Wright Flyer III as well as expanding the exhibit space. In the words of the Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP general management plan, "As a result of these cooperative planning efforts, the current building expansion project includes a wing and two corridors connecting Wright Hall with its next door neighbor—a replica of the last Wright brothers cycle shop." Funding for this project came from state capital funds and an additional state appropriation awarded through the 2003 Fund Committee.⁹²

The NPS also assisted with the conservation of the flyer itself, which took place in the early 2000s. Carillon Historical Park received a Save America's Treasures grant to perform conservation on the airplane, the second such grant for a park resource. The Save America's Treasures program awarded highly competitive grants to restore nationally

⁹² Palermo, "Restoration, Preservation, and Conservation of the 1905 Wright Flyer III," 18; National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan," 18–19, 37, 46–47, quotation from 47.

significant buildings and artifacts, and the fact that both the Dunbar House and the Wright Flyer III received such grants was an important statement about the historical significance of the Dayton “treasures.”

The NPS assisted in the conservation effort by producing a Wright Flyer III conditions report. Ed McManus, the chief conservator at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, joined two NPS Harpers Ferry Center conservators, Jane Merritt and Larry Bowers, to conduct the conditions assessment in March 1999.⁹³ This assessment evaluated the current state of the flyer and provided detailed recommendations for its conservation.

While the flyer was undergoing its conditions assessment, Wright Hall was also being assessed. Quinn Evans Architects completed a draft historic structure report (HSR) for the building in 2000, in time for the final phase of construction work. Some of the HSR recommendations were incorporated into the work then being completed. Subsequent drafts of the HSR provided recommendations for future treatment as well, and the final HSR was released in 2006, after construction on the building was finished.⁹⁴

Work on the flyer was completed in 2001, and the collected buildings interpreting the Wrights at Carillon Historical Park were rededicated in April 2002 as the John W. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers Aviation Center, in time for the 2003 Centennial of Flight.⁹⁵ In 2018, this name changed again, and these buildings are now known as the John W. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers National Museum.⁹⁶

⁹³ Larry Bowers, Jane Merritt, and Ed McManus, “1905 Wright Flyer III Condition Assessment,” Conditions Report (Dayton: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, 1999), v.

⁹⁴ Quinn Evans/Architects, “Historic Structure Report: Wright Hall, Carillon Historical Park, Dayton, Ohio” (Dayton: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, March 2006), 3, https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/daav/wright_hall_hsr.pdf.

⁹⁵ Gibson, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 1996,” 1–2; Laura B. Comay, *National Park Service: Partnership Parks and Programs*, electronic resource (Washington, DC: Library of Congress Congressional Research Service, 2011), 12; Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2001,” 3; Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2002,” 3.

⁹⁶ Sarah Franks, “Dayton Now Home to Wright Brothers National Museum,” *Dayton Daily News*, August 31, 2018.

Hawthorn Hill

Pre-Park History

Hawthorn Hill, in the Oakwood suburb of Dayton, is a grand residence that was intended to be the home of both Orville and Wilbur, as well as their sister Katharine and their father Milton. The family began seeking a new residence in 1909, after the brothers at last received financial rewards from their invention. The Dayton architectural firm Schenck and Williams designed the house with input and ideas from Orville and Wilbur, as well as Katharine, but sadly, Wilbur did not live to see the actual result of their plans. He died in May 1912, and construction on the house began in August 1912. The house was completed in spring 1914, and Orville, Katharine, and Milton moved in.⁹⁷

Of the original inhabitants, Orville lived the longest. Upon his death in 1948, his heirs sold the house to National Cash Register (NCR), at the time chaired by Orville's friend Edward Deeds. The company purchased the home for \$75,000 and used it as a guest house until 2006. As part of the NPS Midwest Regional Office's initial reconnaissance into Dayton's aviation resources, the house was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1990. It was also considered for inclusion in the original legislation authorizing Dayton Aviation History National Historical Park, but local opposition from Oakwood residents stymied that plan (see Chapter 4, "Becoming a National Historical Park," for details). Instead, the home remained in private ownership.⁹⁸

In 2006, NCR divested itself from the property by donating it to the Wright Brothers Family Foundation, who intended to open the site to the public. To accomplish this, the foundation partnered with Dayton History, who would provide public tours of the home and care for the site's collection of Wright artifacts. Hawthorn Hill was added to Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, along with the Wright Company factory, in the 2009 boundary extension. At that time, the Wright Family Foundation retained ownership of the property, but transferred ownership to Dayton History in 2013, along with a \$1.5 million endowment.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 169–75; O'Bright et al., "Hawthorne Hill NHL Nomination," 1990, 8.2–8.7.

⁹⁸ Jill O'Bright et al., "Hawthorn Hill, Dayton, OH," National Historic Landmark Nomination (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1990); Dayton History, "Hawthorn Hill," accessed April 5, 2020, <https://www.daytonhistory.org/visit/dayton-history-sites/hawthorn-hill/>; Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 228; Miller, *The Wrights' Time to Fly: The Family Remembers, Part I*, 23–24.

⁹⁹ Dayton History, "Hawthorn Hill"; "Public Law 111-11: Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009; Section 7117, Dayton Aviation Heritage Boundary Expansion" (2009), <https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/111/11.pdf>; Thomas Gnau, "Dayton History Now Owns Wright Brothers Mansion," *Dayton Daily News*, June 28, 2013.



Hawthorn Hill, the Wright family mansion in Oakwood, Ohio, sometime between 1914 and 1928.
Image: Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppprs-00742.

Park Management

The NPS's role in managing Hawthorn Hill has been mostly advisory. The agency completed a historic furnishings report, describing the contents of the home as it was during Orville Wright's occupancy. A preliminary furnishings study was completed by Sarah Heald, of the NPS Harpers Ferry Center, in 2008, prior to the site's addition to the park. The full furnishings report, prepared by Heald with the assistance of Edward Roach, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP historian, was released in 2010 shortly after Hawthorn Hill was added to the boundaries of the park.¹⁰⁰

NPS staff have served an advisory role in developing interpretation and education programs, as well as routine maintenance of the structure. Roach also assists with National Historic Preservation Act requirements for the property.¹⁰¹ Dayton history handles

¹⁰⁰ Sarah H. Heald, "Hawthorn Hill: A Furnishings History and Recommended Plan" (Harpers Ferry, WV: Harpers Ferry Center, National Park Service, 2010), https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/daav/hawthorn_hill_hfr.pdf.

¹⁰¹ Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2008," 7; Dean Alexander, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009–2011" (National Park Service, 2011), 17, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

day-to-day operations and curatorial cleaning.¹⁰² The 2017 “Foundation Document” for Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP identified the need for cultural landscape and historic structure reports for Hawthorn Hill, as well as a transportation plan. None of these efforts have yet to be funded as of spring 2022. The “Foundation Document” also identified the need for the general management plan amendment (underway as of this writing in 2022) to incorporate the site into the park’s larger management strategy.¹⁰³

Wright Company Factory

Pre-Park History

In 1909, the Wright brothers partnered with a group of New York City financiers, including Cornelius Vanderbilt and Howard Gould, to form the Wright Company, which would commercially manufacture airplanes based on the Wrights’ invention. The Wrights would own a 40 percent stake in the company and receive a 10 percent royalty on every airplane sold, in addition to an initial lump sum of \$100,000. In exchange, the brothers assigned their patent rights to the company.¹⁰⁴

The Wright Company was headquartered on Fifth Avenue in New York City, but the brothers insisted that the actual manufacturing take place in Dayton. Initially, they converted their bicycle shop at 1127 West Third Street to become the brothers’ offices and the Wright Company engine shop, while the full planes were manufactured in rented space at the Speedway Motor Car Company, at 1420 Wisconsin Boulevard, in the Edgemont neighborhood of Dayton. While manufacturing planes at the Speedway site, the company began building a custom-made facility just off West Third Street.¹⁰⁵

The first building on this site was completed in November 1910 and became the first purpose-built airplane factory in the United States.¹⁰⁶ According to the park’s historic resource study, “it was a one-story brick building containing a total of 4,000 square feet. Upon completion of the building, all operations, including the construction of motors, transferred to the site. To meet the demands of the increasing business, an additional

¹⁰² Ed Roach, “Re: DAAV Questions: Specific,” transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, May 19, 2022.

¹⁰³ “Foundation Document: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park” (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, January 2017), 17–18, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

¹⁰⁴ Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 161; Roach, *The Wright Company*, 17–23; Gaffney, *Dayton Flight Factory*, 94.

¹⁰⁵ Roach, *The Wright Company*, 38–39; Gaffney, *Dayton Flight Factory*, 94–96; Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 162; National Park Service, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan,” 50. The factory does not have a consistent address; it is sometimes listed as 2701 Home Avenue and sometimes listed as 99 Cowart Avenue.

¹⁰⁶ Gaffney, *Dayton Flight Factory*, 11.

factory building was completed on the site in 1911. With the two factory buildings, The Wright Company was able to produce four airplanes per month, the greatest production capacity of any airplane factory in the world. The first models manufactured at this site included the Model B, Model EX, Model C, and Model D.¹⁰⁷

The Wright Company operated at this site from 1910 to 1916, and during this time thirteen models of airplanes were manufactured there.¹⁰⁸ Orville Wright, never much of a businessperson, sold his share of the company in 1915. (Wilbur Wright died in 1912.) The new owners initially continued to operate the Dayton factory site. In August 1916, however, the Wright Company merged with the Glenn L. Martin Company, an airplane manufacturing competitor based in Los Angeles. By that time, the Dayton factory site was being operated by a skeleton crew of less than twenty employees, and in February 1917, the company (now named Wright-Martin) closed the Dayton operations entirely and relocated production to New Jersey.¹⁰⁹

The Dayton factory buildings became part of various manufacturing enterprises in the years after the Wright Company used them. They became the “birthplace” of General Motors’ Inland Division, then part of Delco and then Delphi. In 2009, when the Wright Company factory buildings were added to the park boundaries, they were part of an industrial complex no longer in active use.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Honious, *What Dreams We Have*, 162–63.

¹⁰⁸ National Park Service, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan,” 50.

¹⁰⁹ Roach, *The Wright Company*, 169–73.

¹¹⁰ Gaffney, *Dayton Flight Factory*, 11, 93, quotation from 93.



The Wright Company factory buildings, 1911. Image: Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppprs-00712.

Park Management

In the early 1990s, when staff at the NPS Midwest Regional Office were evaluating Dayton's historic resources for the possibility of creating a national park unit related to the city's aviation heritage, the Wright Company factory site was included among the sites to be considered. At that time, the buildings were determined to be ineligible for National Historic Landmark (NHL) status, and the resource was not included in the creation of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP.¹¹¹ The reasons for these determinations are not entirely clear, but at the time the buildings were evaluated, they were in private commercial ownership and part of an active industrial operation. According to Park Historian Edward Roach, the corporate owner was opposed to an NHL nomination and possible NPS acquisition.¹¹²

¹¹¹ National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan," 50.

¹¹² Edward Roach, Oral History, interview by Susan Ferentinos, May 18, 2022, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

In 2004, the NHL Aviation Theme Study, jointly funded by the National Park Service and the US Air Force, was released and included the Wright Company factory buildings on its list of nationally significant sites related to the history of aviation.¹¹³ On December 8, 2004, P.L. 108-447 directed the Secretary of the Interior to study the factory site as a possible unit of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. The result of that directive was *The Wright Company Factory Boundary Assessment and Environmental Assessment*, released in January 2006. The environmental assessment was prepared by Parsons Environmental and Infrastructure Group Inc., in consultation with a planning team that included representatives of Delphi Automotive Systems, LLC (the owner of the property); Mary Mathews and Tony Sculimbrene of the Aviation Heritage Foundation; Lawrence Blake, Ann Honious, and Timothy Good from Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP; and Sharon Miles, Sandra Washington, and William Harlow of the NPS Midwest Regional Office.¹¹⁴

The report found the factory site nationally significant and “feasible, when evaluated on the factors of size, configuration, hazardous substances, access, community support, and impacts on local communities and surrounding jurisdictions.” However, the report found that the site was not feasible when considered for efficient administration at a reasonable cost. Instead, it determined that “the costs to the NPS of developing and managing the site would be prohibitively high.” It went on to say, “Therefore, based on evaluation of all factors, the NPS concludes that the addition of the Wright Company factory site would only be a feasible addition to the boundary of Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park if a financially viable and willing partner steps forward to shoulder the costs of site development.”¹¹⁵

Between this determination in 2006 and 2009, when the site was indeed added to Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, Delphi declared bankruptcy and announced an end of production at its manufacturing site in West Dayton, which included the Wright Company buildings. Faced with yet another plant closure in a local economy that once relied so heavily on manufacturing, Dayton leaders again focused on tourism and the National Park Service as their answer to deindustrialization. They began advocating for the Wright Company factory sites to be included in the boundaries of the national historical park, despite the 2006 findings.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ “American Aviation Heritage: A National Historic Landmarks Theme Study” (Washington, DC: National Park Service, March 2011), 240, <http://npshistory.com/publications/nhl/theme-studies/aviation.pdf>. This theme study was revised in 2011, and the older edition is no longer readily available. However, because the factory is included in the 2011 edition and because of Congressional action in 2004, I am extrapolating that the site was also included in the 2004 edition.

¹¹⁴ “The Wright Company Factory Boundary Assessment and Environmental Assessment” (Dayton, OH: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, January 2006), 1–45, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library. Mary Mathews was the executive director of Carillon Historical Park until 2005, but in this document, her affiliation is listed as the Aviation Heritage Foundation.

¹¹⁵ “Wright Company Factory Boundary Assessment and Environmental Assessment,” 43.

¹¹⁶ “Wright Company Factory Boundary Assessment and Environmental Assessment,” 43.

A 2008 editorial in the *Dayton Daily News* reminded readers of Delphi's pull-out from the factory site and its plans to demolish "all, or much of" the factory complex. However, the article continued, "Delphi hasn't said no to giving historically significant buildings [i.e., the two Wright Company buildings] to the National Park Service."¹¹⁷ According to the piece:

The National Park Service has evaluated the site for its significance and integrity. Its experts liked what they saw, but the park service isn't eager to add to its national inventory; it doesn't have the money to take care of what it already owns.

Nonetheless, U.S. Rep. Mike Turner, R-Centerville, is pushing a bill through the House that would add the Wright Factory buildings and Hawthorn Hill, Orville's home in Oakwood, to the park service's assets. . . . Local people are counting on Sen. Sherrod Brown to carry the proposal in the Senate.¹¹⁸

Despite not having identified a source of funding for the site's redevelopment and maintenance, the opinion piece cast its vote for inclusion, arguing, "Sometimes a community just has to take a plunge. The Delphi site—particularly with its history—surely can be developed eventually."¹¹⁹

Local leaders got their wish when in 2009 Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's boundary was expanded to include the factory site, along with Hawthorn Hill. Funding for rehabilitation had not yet been found, however, and it was 2012 before any movement toward redevelopment took place. That year, the Clean Ohio Fund approved \$3 million to assist with cleanup at the site. The *Dayton Daily News* reported that the city of Dayton was working with a group named Home Avenue Redevelopment LLC (a subsidiary of Hull & Associates, a brownfields redevelopment firm) to redevelop the property, with involvement and additional funding from DPH Holdings, the company in charge of former Delphi properties.¹²⁰

Simultaneously, Edward Roach, historian for Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, was researching the history of the Wright Company, including its factory, with funding from the National Parks Foundation. The resulting book, *The Wright Company: From Invention to Industry*, was published by Ohio University Press in 2014.¹²¹ As part of this project, Roach also pursued the possibility of nominating the factory site to NHL status, but the

¹¹⁷ Jessica Wehrman, "Dayton Leaders to Present Ideas in DC—The Dayton Development Coalition's Fly-In Will Meet to Discuss Projects and Policies That Will Benefit the Area," *Dayton Daily News*, April 29, 2008; "Wright Plane Factory Too Significant to Lose," *Dayton Daily News*, July 7, 2008.

¹¹⁸ "Wright Plane Factory Too Significant to Lose."

¹¹⁹ "Wright Plane Factory Too Significant to Lose."

¹²⁰ "Wright Plane Factory Too Significant to Lose."

¹²¹ Thomas Gnau, "\$3M OK'd for Wright Factory," *Dayton Daily News* (May 22, 2012), in "Vertical File: Dayton Aviation Heritage Press Re: Park Development" (n.d.), Vertical Files, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Thomas Gnau, "Wright Factories Anchor West-Side Redevelopment," *Dayton Daily News* (June 3, 2012), in "Vertical File: Dayton Aviation Heritage Press Re: Park Development"; Steve Bennish, "Historic Wright Factory May Be Spared—'Preservation Will Educate, Inspire.' Dayton Approves Redevelopment Agreement.," *Dayton Daily News*, November 29, 2012.

Washington office of the NHL program did not think such a process was necessary, given that its inclusion in a national park unit had already recognized the property as nationally historically significant.¹²² Instead, the National Aviation Heritage Alliance, using volunteer and paid labor, completed a National Register of Historic Places nomination for the factory. The site was added to the register in September 2019, with local significance for the period 1910–55.¹²³

In October 2018, the city of Dayton purchased a fifty-four-acre parcel of the former Delphi manufacturing site that included the two Wright Company factory buildings. In November 2019, the NPS Midwest Regional Office gave Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP official approval to purchase the Wright Company factory buildings.¹²⁴ In the words of park historian Edward Roach:

For a while, it seemed like the [National Aviation] Heritage Area was going to take ownership of them; that didn't work out. In fact, there is still money in Columbus with the state budget that is specifically earmarked for the Wright Company factory buildings' acquisition that we're working to acquire, to throw into the buildings once we do acquire them. And the boundary has shifted. . . the actual National Park authorized boundary's about twenty acres. This current acquisition is looking at about 3.5. More focused around the first, the 1910 and 1911, buildings and a little bit of land around them.¹²⁵

Planning for the future of the factory site is an essential component of the park's General Management Plan Amendment, in process as of 2022.

Conclusion

Cultural resource management is an essential area of partnership at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. All of the park's historically significant structures and areas, save for the Wright Cycle Company and the Hoover Block, are owned by other entities. As such, all repairs, rehabilitation, and preservation activities are undertaken as collaborative efforts, with the National Park Service serving primarily in an advisory capacity. NPS expertise at

¹²² Roach, *The Wright Company*; Dean Alexander, "State of the Park Report, FY 2014" (National Park Service, 2014), 2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

¹²³ Alexander, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009–2011," 15.

¹²⁴ Kendell Thompson, Superintendent, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP to Regional Director, Interior Region 3, "Memorandum: Acquisition of Wright Company Factory and Associated Land and Buildings, Dayton, OH," October 15, 2019, FY20 102-01 Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Land Acquisition, Midwest Regional Office Archives, Lincoln, NE; Max Filby, "Wright Airplane Factory Placed on National Historic Registry," *Dayton Daily News*, September 16, 2019; note that the National Archives and Records Administration has not yet digitized this nomination as of 2022.

¹²⁵ Chief, Land Resources Division, DOI Regions 3, 4, 5 to Regional Director, DOI Regions 3, 4, 5, "Memorandum: Land Acquisition Request for the Wright Company Factory at Dayton Aviation," November 4, 2019, FY20 102-01 Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Land Acquisition, Midwest Regional Office Archives, Lincoln, NE.

the park, the Midwest Regional Office, Harpers Ferry Center, and the Denver Service Center ensures that the park's cultural resources are preserved and interpreted using best practices, and that the care of the five national historic landmarks and two national register historic districts located within park boundaries complies with the stipulations of the National Historic Preservation Act.

CHAPTER NINE

Interpretation and Education

The 1990s, particularly under NPS director Roger G. Kennedy (1993–97), were a period when interpretation and education were given added priority within the National Park Service (NPS). Among other initiatives, the NPS released a completely restructured thematic framework for US history. The thematic framework is used for evaluating historic resources and developing interpretation, and the 1990s version, released in 1994, moved away from a premise of American exceptionalism and unimpeded progress to a structure that allowed for a greater diversity of stories and perspectives. It was within this context that planning and development for Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park (NHP) took place.¹

This chapter provides a general overview of interpretation and education at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, followed by a discussion of a few specific interpretive initiatives. As with other areas of park management, interpretation and education at the park have involved extensive negotiation among park partners, in order to ensure that the story being told is consistent across resources managed by different entities. This chapter concludes with a consideration of a few interpretive avenues that the park has not yet pursued.

Overall Approach to Interpretation and Education

Since the authorization of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP in 1992, the park has operated under two long-range interpretive plans (LRIPs). The first was released in 1997 while the park was in its planning and development phase. This plan was developed simultaneously with the park's general management plan (GMP), and the two documents were so closely

¹ "Past Directors of the National Park Service," US National Park Service, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/nps-directors.htm>; Barry Mackintosh, Janet A. McDonnell, and John H. Sprinkle, *The National Parks: Shaping the System*, 4th ed., reprinted in *George Wright Forum*, v. 35, no. 2 (2018) (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2018), 74; Park History Program, "History in the National Park Service: Themes & Concepts" (Washington DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1994).

intertwined that they were ultimately published as a single document. The park's second interpretive plan was released in 2018, in keeping with the NPS's general effort to update these documents every fifteen to twenty years.²

The 1997 General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan

Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's initial planning and development process was encapsulated by a combined GMP and LRIP released in 1997, just over four years after the park was authorized. The document's introduction explained the decision to publish the reports together. "Because interpretation will play a major role in the development of this park, it was determined that combining the plans would present a more complete picture of the park's proposed course of action."³

As is common with the NPS, the interpretive planning process included extensive input from park stakeholders. In the case of Dayton, representatives from the legislated park partners, plus Aviation Trail, Inc., the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission, and the 2003 Fund Committee, joined Superintendent William Gibson, Historian Ann Deines (later Honious), and Park Ranger Bob Petersen from the park on the core team developing the plan. Representatives from other NPS offices included Tom White from the Harpers Ferry Center (who served as interpretive plan team captain), Ronald W. Johnson from the Denver Service Center (who served as GMP team captain), and Warren Bielenberg from the Great Lakes Systems Support Office. Rounding out the core team was Wilkinson "Wick" Wright, the Wright brothers' grandnephew, who represented the Wright family's interests. The interpretive planning team was composed of different people than the general management plan team, with some overlap.⁴

Unlike some NPS units, which are able to develop their interpretive materials from the ground up, all of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's original sites, except for its two interpretive centers, were already open and being interpreted to the public before the park's creation. Thus, while the LRIP included the usual elements, such as a delineation of the park's interpretive themes, it also devoted space to outlining each of the partners' roles and emphasizing the need for visitors to the various park sites to receive a "unified interpretive framework."⁵

² National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan" (Denver: US Department of the Interior, 1997); Interpretive Solutions Inc., "Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Long-Range Interpretive Plan" (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, December 2018).

³ National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan," iii.

⁴ National Park Service, 110–12.

⁵ National Park Service, quotation from ii.

Recollections from Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's first permanent interpretive ranger, Bob Petersen, emphasize the importance placed on this goal: "Because this was a partnership between the Park Service and other entities, other agencies, we spent a great deal of time talking about what this park would look like. Who would tell what part of the story where? How that story would be told. . . . So, a lot of time was spent, a lot of public meetings were held, getting community input to try and figure out how we would tell these stories across the broader spectrum of the Dayton region. And what resulted I think was something that I think is very successful."⁶

To address the issue of each site presenting interpretation that had been developed by a different organization, the planning team ceded a good deal of autonomy to park partners, seeking (at that point in the park's history, the late 1990s) to ensure only that the overall interpretation was cohesive and not redundant. In the plan's words: "The partners will continue their site-specific interpretive programs that will focus on their particular role in the developing of the aviation heritage story in Dayton. The Park Service will seek to minimize unnecessary interpretive overlap. Emphasis will reside on each site's strengths in providing a portion of the whole story and not digress to less significant or extraneous interpretive aspects."⁷

The park agreed to provide technical assistance and training in interpretive methods to the partners. And when it came time to update the interpretive elements at each partner site, the report stated, "The National Park Service will provide planning and design assistance for the exhibit areas for Wright Hall at Carillon Historical Park and the exhibit galleries at the Paul Laurence Dunbar House, when requested and if resources are available."⁸

The 1997 plan called for staff at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP to focus their interpretive efforts on the park's two visitor centers—one located in a renovated Hoover Block and the other a new construction on Wright Brothers Hill at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base (AFB), overlooking Huffman Prairie Flying Field. The two visitor centers were envisioned as providing two interpretive anchors—west and east—to the multiple park sites. To further unify the visitor experience, the plan suggested the creation of take-along tools that visitors could engage with as they traveled between park sites. These tools included a park brochure and an audio tour. Finally, the plan suggested further unifying the message of Dayton's aviation heritage by providing interpretive waysides at other local aviation sites, outside the park boundaries.⁹

⁶ Bob Petersen, Oral History, interview by Casey Huegel, December 1, 2016, 4–5, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁷ National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan," 28.

⁸ National Park Service, 28, 72, quotation from 72.

⁹ National Park Service, 23, 62, 66–69.



Park staff, April 1995. From left to right are Steve Lauer, Ann Deines (Honious), William Gibson, and Rae Boyd.
Image: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

The 2018 Long-Range Interpretive Plan

Approximately twenty years after the park released its original interpretive plan, staff embarked on another one, updated to reflect changing priorities, scholarship, and capacity. This timeline is typical of the National Park Service, which generally advises that core planning documents have a roughly twenty-year lifespan.¹⁰

Unlike the 1997 plan, which had relied on internal NPS expertise in developing such documents, the creation of the 2018 LRIP was outsourced to Interpretive Solutions Inc., a Philadelphia-based interpretive planning consultancy with experience developing LRIPs for the NPS.¹¹ The choice to bring in outside consultants reflects a larger trend within the National Park Service. From the 1990s to the present, the agency has increasingly outsourced the development of planning, resource management, and interpretive documents to the private sector. Specialists in these subjects from within the agency now more often provide project management and oversight of outside contractors, rather than producing such documents in house.

¹⁰ Interpretive Solutions Inc., “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Long-Range Interpretive Plan.”

¹¹ Interpretive Solutions Inc., 75.

Accordingly, the 2018 LRIP team had only two NPS representatives from outside Dayton, Toni Dufficy and Peggy Scherbaum from the NPS Harpers Ferry Center, although park staff were well represented on the team. The National Aviation Heritage Area was also represented. As with the 1997 plan, representatives of park partners also served on the team, though in smaller numbers. In addition, numerous other organizations were part of the 2018 interpretive planning process. Although not legislated partners, these other organizations suggest some of the interpretive areas park managers were interested in expanding. These organizations included Dayton Regional STEM Center, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), the Dayton Foundation, Dayton Metro Library, RLM Consultants, WYSO Public Radio, and Wright State University Public History Program.¹²

Much had changed in the twenty years since the last interpretive plan. In 1997, the park was still under development, and as such, the 1997 plan provided a baseline from which to start the creation of interpretive materials and programs. In 2018, the first wave of exhibits and programs had been in operation for nearly fifteen years, and the park service was in a position to assess their effectiveness and expand its vision for the information it shared with its public. The park had also acquired two additional sites since the original interpretive plan—Hawthorn Hill and the Wright Company factory. Finally, technology had fundamentally changed day-to-day life in the United States, as the internet became an integral part of most people’s lives and social media grew to be a major source of news and information.

Interestingly, although the 2018 LRIP mentions the acquisition of the new park sites, it does not devote significant discussion to these resources. Regarding Hawthorn Hill, the report explains, “The home is a compelling part of the story, but the NPS does not have a formal role in operating the site.”¹³ The Wright Company factory, on the other hand, was not yet open to the public and was then on the market for public sale.¹⁴ With the future still so unknown, the team apparently opted not to devote much time to interpretive planning for this site. Instead, one of the report’s recommendations stated, “If the [factory] complex becomes a park resource, a separate management plan to include interpretive uses will be developed for that site.”¹⁵

In contrast to the new park units, social media—a new development since the 1997 interpretive plan—received substantial attention in the 2018 plan. By that time, social media giants Facebook and Twitter had been in operation for more than a decade, yet the LRIP acknowledged that the park had only “an early stage social media footprint.”¹⁶ Challenges to expanding that footprint included the park’s lack of a formal social media

¹² Interpretive Solutions Inc., 75.

¹³ Interpretive Solutions Inc., 19.

¹⁴ Interpretive Solutions Inc., 17.

¹⁵ Interpretive Solutions Inc., 37.

¹⁶ Interpretive Solutions Inc., 39.

policy and the fact that the park's social media manager was not based in Dayton and was responsible for the social media of multiple national park sites. (In 2018, the park's social media was handled by Tom Engberg, a visitor information specialist at Hopewell Culture National Historical Park.) To improve the park's social media presence, the LRIP recommended completing the social media policy that was then underway, creating a park hashtag and other ways for users to interact with the park through social media, encouraging bloggers to blog about the park, creating more dialogue with social media followers, and using Google Analytics to determine the actual effectiveness of these strategies.¹⁷

In addition to social media, the 2018 plan identifies the Paul Laurence Dunbar House and Huffman Prairie Flying Field as park sites with more interpretive potential than had yet been accomplished. As the report explained it, "Both locations are owned by partner organizations, yet both are primarily promoted and operated by National Park Service staff."¹⁸ In the case of the Dunbar House, the park's level of involvement had changed since the 1997 interpretive plan. In 1997, the Ohio Historical Society held primary responsibility for staffing and interpretation, but this responsibility shifted first to Dayton History, then in 2015 to Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. In the case of Huffman Prairie Flying Field, the interpretive planning team felt that logistical issues continued to limit the interpretive impact of this unit.¹⁹

Changes between the 1997 and 2018 Interpretive Themes

Changes to the park's interpretive themes between the 1997 and 2018 interpretive plans reflect larger changes at play within the historical and interpretive fields, within the National Park Service as a whole, and within American culture itself.

The interpretive themes put forward in the 1997 interpretive plan were as follows:

- The Wright brothers' invention of powered flight fundamentally affected the evolution of world civilization.
- Wilbur and Orville Wright's willingness to question accepted scientific data and their confidence to act upon their own data enabled them to succeed.
- The Wright brothers' achievements established Dayton as the birthplace of aviation.
- Their extraordinary family provided the foundation for Wilbur and Orville's scientific and technological triumphs.

¹⁷ Interpretive Solutions Inc., 39–45; Edward Roach, "Re: DAAV Questions: Specific," transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, May 19, 2022.

¹⁸ Interpretive Solutions Inc., 3.

¹⁹ Interpretive Solutions Inc., 25–38.

- Paul Laurence Dunbar achieved international and national recognition in a literary world that was closed to African Americans.²⁰

In contrast, the themes put forth in the 2018 interpretive plan were both greater in number and more detailed. They read:

- Raised by a single mother who was formerly enslaved, Paul Laurence Dunbar overcame multiple obstacles—poverty, racism, poor health, and personal challenges—to become a leader in literature and to lay the foundation for the success of others, inspiring artists and writers during the Harlem Renaissance. By the time of his death at the age of 33, Dunbar had risen socially and economically through the success of his writings to a place aspired to by many Americans.
- In 1936, the state of Ohio purchased the Dunbar House, establishing the nation’s first state-owned African American historical site, a landmark in diversifying the nation’s collective memory. This political act validated decades of work by Dunbar’s mother Matilda Dunbar and Dayton’s citizens to preserve and share Dunbar’s life and legacy.
- The 1905 Wright Flyer III is the world’s first controllable, practical airplane, which, through innovation and ingenuity, ushered in the age of human flight and transformed travel, transportation, and warfare, thereby fundamentally changing the world.
- The Wright Cycle Company, Hoover Block, and Wright Company Factory demonstrate the significance of imagination and collaboration in the growth and development of the Wright brothers’ entrepreneurial activities. These few remaining buildings directly connected with the story of the Wrights provide opportunities to understand how resourcefulness and experimental risk-taking launched a pioneering company in the aviation industry.
- The Wright brothers worked at Huffman Prairie to navigate the risks and challenges of early flight, and through resolve and a scientific approach to solving complex problems developed a practical system of control for their experimental flyer.
- In the Dayton region, the invention of the airplane led to a legacy of continued aviation development that established the United States as a world leader in military and commercial aircraft and space vehicles. The Heritage Area of which the park is a unit serves as a gateway to the many organizations and sites tracing their roots to the Wright brothers.
- Hawthorn Hill, commissioned by the Wright brothers with the proceeds from their inventions and business ventures, reflects the success and wealth they attained. Wilbur died before the home was built, but the home allowed Orville to enjoy the fruits of his life’s work in the company of his family and others.

²⁰ National Park Service, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan,” 53–55.

- The brothers' focus on experimenting in remote locations demonstrated a prescient understanding of secrecy necessary to protect their research and discoveries, which is reflected in U.S. aviation efforts currently in development at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.
- The Wrights demonstrated that great accomplishments could be achieved with modest financial resources, persistent application of the scientific method, and a keen eye for efficiency.²¹

While the two sets of interpretive themes carry much of the same historical information, the emphasis is different. In 1997, the story was told in terms of extraordinary individuals; the 2018 themes place these individuals within larger contexts. Likewise, the 1997 themes stress information while the 2018 themes seem equally concerned with information and the lessons and insight to be learned from that information. Words like “demonstrate,” “validate,” and “signify” appear repeatedly in the 2018 themes but are entirely absent from the 1997 themes. Interestingly, both plans included a theme related to the airplane's impact on the city of Dayton, an oddly local emphasis for a national historical park, but one reflective of the park's origins as an effort by local leaders to reclaim the city's industrial past. Similarly, both plans reference the phenomenal changes brought about by the invention of flight, although one could argue that this theme is still underrepresented in the park's interpretation as of 2022, save for the airplane's impact on the military and on space exploration.

Some of the differences between the two plans reflect changing NPS priorities as well as historiographical trends. The 1997 plan focused primarily on Dunbar as an individual, albeit one who prospered despite racial discrimination. Twenty years later, the 2018 plan explicitly included the need to address systemic racism, the socioeconomic context in which the Wrights and Dunbar lived, and the management goal of expanding the general interpretation of African American history, in addition to the Dunbar story. This developing nuance reflected changes both in the NPS's thinking about creating relevance for visitors and in historical scholarship, which increasingly addressed the past through the lens of identity categories such as race and class.²² The profession's growing consideration of gender is less obvious in the 2018 interpretive plan, although it is evident in the inclusion of Matilda Dunbar in the interpretive themes, and in a comment later in the plan stating, “The story of early aviation and the barriers presented to different racial groups and women create an opportunity to engage diverse audiences and open a dialogue on social change.”²³

²¹ Interpretive Solutions Inc., “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Long-Range Interpretive Plan,” 7–8.

²² For a discussion of the National Park Service's efforts to remain relevant, see Chapter 2 of this report.

²³ Interpretive Solutions Inc., “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Long-Range Interpretive Plan,” 14.

The 2018 LRIP also acknowledged changes to the interpretive field, listing as a management goal “better incorporation of 21st-century interpretive techniques.”²⁴ Although the plan does not go into detail about what these techniques are, we can see them reflected in the 2018 interpretive themes. The early twenty-first century witnessed a shift in museum interpretation from conveying information to facilitating meaning-making for visitors. This shift led to more dialogue-based interpretation, community-curated exhibits, more nuanced consideration of historical actors as complicated human beings, and greater comfort with drawing comparisons between the present and the past.²⁵ These trends are also evident in the 2018 plan’s other management goals that involve providing “takeaways” for the visitors, facilitating “personal connections” with the interpretation, and creating opportunities for visitors to “see themselves” in the Wright and Dunbar stories.²⁶

Long-range interpretive plans provide guidelines for a national park unit’s overall approach to interpretation and education, as well as explicitly detailing the themes that each interpretive program should be guiding the visitor toward. As such, analyzing changes between LRIPs can provide a big-picture sense of how park interpretive messages have changed over time. However, they are documents few visitors ever see. Generally speaking, visitors’ first experience with a national park unit’s interpretation comes at one of the park’s interpretive centers. To expand on the history of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP’s interpretation and education, we now turn to the development of interpretation within its two visitor centers.

²⁴ Interpretive Solutions Inc., 7–9, quotation from 9.

²⁵ Literature on these changes in interpretation abounds. See, for instance, Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene, and Laura Koloski, eds., *Letting Go?: Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World* (Philadelphia: Pew Center for Arts & Heritage; Distributed by Left Coast Press, 2011).

²⁶ Interpretive Solutions Inc., “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Long-Range Interpretive Plan,” 9.



The exterior of the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center in 2010. Image: NPS Media Gallery, Asset ID: 60A35479-155D-4519-3E872FB7F22F7DB7.

NPS Interpretation within the Park

Interpretive Centers

The 1997 GMP and LRIP envisioned the park's two visitor centers serving as gateways to the park, orienting visitors as well as providing initial interpretation in the form of large permanent exhibits and an orientation film. Both facilities would have certain features in common: uniformed frontline NPS staff, visitor facilities, maps showing the park's various sites in relation to each other, information about other aviation-related sites in the Miami Valley and in North Carolina (Wright Brothers National Monument), a sales area, and a dedicated theater space to show the park orientation film, available in multiple languages.²⁷

²⁷ National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan," 57–60. In reality, the park orientation film has only ever been available in English, according to Edward Roach, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

Beyond these core elements, however, each interpretive center would have a different focus. The Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center (WDIC), located in the park's core parcel, would provide the story of the Wright brothers and Paul Laurence Dunbar, with explanations of each's life and family relationships, the three's relationship with each other, and their relationship to the surrounding neighborhood (although, arguably, Dunbar's associations with the neighborhood surrounding the Hoover Block were tenuous; his home was located a half-mile away from the core parcel). In addition, the Wrights' publishing business would be interpreted on the second floor of the WDIC, where it had originally been located in the 1890s.²⁸

The Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center (HPFFIC), in contrast, would focus on the practical elements of flight developed at Huffman Prairie, as well as the legacy of Dayton's aviation heritage, as embodied by Wright-Patterson AFB, which visitors would need to enter in order to visit the interpretive center. This site would also interpret the local Wright Brothers Monument, which (although not within the park boundaries) is located adjacent to the HPFFIC. A bit of environmental education would also be included, since Huffman Prairie represents "Ohio's largest surviving natural prairie."²⁹

As discussed previously, the 2003 Centennial of Flight had served as a major motivation for the establishment of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, and throughout the park's planning and development phase, 2003 remained the target date by which the park would be fully operational and open to the public. As a result, the design of both interpretive centers, both exhibits, and the park orientation film took place simultaneously. Similarly, renovation of the Hoover Block to become the WDIC, construction of the HPFFIC, and fabrication of the exhibits also took place simultaneously, primarily in the period between 2000 and 2003.³⁰

Construction of the HPFFIC finished first, in July 2002, during a time when Wright-Patterson AFB was closed to the public in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. However, the center's interpretive exhibit was not yet fabricated. Thus, when the part of the base containing Wright Brothers Hill reopened in August 2002, the interpretive center opened to visitors without exhibits. For the month of August, NPS interpreters staffed the building four days a week to allow visitors to see the new building

²⁸ National Park Service, 60.

²⁹ National Park Service, 61.

³⁰ Lawrence Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2000" (National Park Service, 2000), 5, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Lawrence Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2001" (National Park Service, 2001), 2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Lawrence Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2002" (National Park Service, 2002), 3, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Lawrence Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2003" (National Park Service, 2003), 2, 3, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

and learn about the upcoming exhibits. The exhibits were installed that fall, and the official dedication ceremony for the HPFFIC was held on December 17, 2002 (the ninety-ninth anniversary of flight), attended by NPS Director Fran Mainella.³¹

The exhibits at the HPFFIC were developed by Christopher Chadbourne and Associates, out of Boston. Locally, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Historian Ann Honious and Wright-Patterson AFB Cultural Resource Manager Jan Ferguson headed up the team working on the exhibit's content. Honious also took the lead in reaching out to other museums to identify possible artifacts available for loan that could be used in the park exhibits.³² Ferguson recalled that, in addition to the other park partners, Henry Narducci, Wright-Patterson AFB historian, and representatives from the National Museum of the US Air Force (also located at Wright-Patterson AFB) were actively involved in the exhibit-planning process and were particularly helpful in identifying artifacts at the base or the museum that could be included in the interpretive center exhibit.³³

Developing the HPFFIC exhibit involved careful negotiation between the park, the air force museum, and the base. From the beginning, the park strove to complement the content already being delivered at the air force museum, rather than repeat the same story. The museum was already an established Dayton tourist attraction, and the park was well aware that a significant portion of its visitors would have come to Dayton, first and foremost, to see the air force museum. If they were to be enticed to stay and visit Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP as well, the park needed to offer a story visitors would not have already encountered at the museum. Ranger Bob Petersen, who led the interpretive staff at the HPFFIC in its early years, recalled that the park also established the center's operating hours with an eye toward the National Museum of the US Air Force: "During the summer-time, from Memorial Day to Labor Day, we kept the visitor center out on the base open from 8:30 until 6:00. The air force museum closed at five, a lot of people in the area looking for things to do. They were coming up to the hill anyway, so why not capture some of those people? And that's what we tried to do for four or five years."³⁴

³¹ Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2002," 4; Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2003," 4; Dayton Aviation Heritage News Release, July 16, 2002, in "Vertical File: Huffman Prairie Interpretive Center and Flying Field, Misc." (n.d.), Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

³² Ann Honious, Oral History, interview by Susan Ferentinos, August 23, 2021, 9, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Honious, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

³³ Jan Ferguson, Oral History, interview by Casey Huegel, August 5, 2015, 13–14, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

³⁴ Petersen, Oral History, 11.

At the same time, since the air force museum interprets the national story of the US Air Force, Wright-Patterson AFB personnel were eager to see a more specific history of their base represented in the exhibit at the HPFFIC. The result was an HPFFIC exhibit that discusses the legacy of the Wright brothers' invention by tracing its impact on aeronautical research and development—much of which now takes place at Wright-Patterson AFB.³⁵

In August 2003, about eight months after the HPFFIC had officially opened, the park introduced enhanced interpretation via “handheld devices linked to a speedy wireless network.” In 2003, using such technology for museum interpretation was still a new concept, as demonstrated by a newspaper article’s description of what has become a standard interpretive technique. After picking up a handheld computer at the HPFFIC welcome desk, “visitors are then guided through three topics that supplement the museum’s exhibit areas.” The article went on: “The free program also uses historic photos, storytelling, music, and graphics. The content, delivered in 15- to 30-second segments, allows visitors to access as little or as much information as desired.” The program had been funded through a partnership between the NPS, the National Park Foundation, and “several technology and media companies,” again highlighting the newness of wireless internet access and handheld computers. The technology firms presumably funded the program as a means of exposing people to the potential of their products.³⁶

The HPFFIC exhibit was enhanced again in 2006, when the Wright Family Foundation donated a 1911 Wright Model B flight simulator to the park. The donated item represented an “off the shelf” simulator from a company named The Wright Experience, with modification to bring the equipment into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The simulator operated off and on until about 2016, when it could no longer be repaired. The simulator software was designed to operate with Windows XP, an operating system that by 2016 was obsolete. In the words of Park Historian Edward Roach, “Technological obsolescence is a real problem with our more techie exhibits that were somewhat cutting-edge for 2002/2003, but are relics Macgyvered together these days, if they work at all.”³⁷

Meanwhile, back in West Dayton in 2003, the park’s other interpretive center took longer to complete than the HPFFIC, even though the WDIC was a rehabilitation rather than a new construction. The work required two extensions of the contract with Bruce Construction Company, and in this case, the exhibit was completed before the building was

³⁵ Ferguson, Oral History, 14–17.

³⁶ Julia Frasure, “Park Service Partners to Use Wireless Technology at Museum,” *Skywriter*, August 8, 2003, Vertical File: Huffman Prairie Interpretive Center and Flying Field, misc., Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

³⁷ National Park Service, “Project Agreement for Interpretive Media Development, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP: Flight Simulator Exhibit” (November 13, 2006), folder 1, box 1, Ann Honious Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Edward Roach, “Simulator,” transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, May 19, 2022.

finished. Although the rehabilitation was not entirely completed, the interpretive center, with its exhibits, opened to the public on June 27, 2003, well into the anniversary year, but still in time for Dayton's major celebration in July 2003 and six months before the December 2003 centennial of the first flight.³⁸

The WDIC exhibit was developed by the same design firm that developed the HPFFIC exhibit, Christopher Chadbourne and Associates. This firm also developed a new exhibit at the Wright Cycle Company during the same period it was working on both interpretive center exhibits.³⁹ Ann Honious again headed the team developing content for the WDIC exhibit, having authored the park's historic resource study, which was being finalized during this same period. In her words: "We involved all of the partners in the charettes. But when it came to writing text and selecting photos and working on really the fruition of the full exhibit, that was something that I did. It was solely the park service. Everyone at that time was very busy getting ready for the Centennial of Flight. Carillon Park was putting in their exhibit at the same time Dunbar House was working on their facility."⁴⁰

One of the main challenges with the WDIC exhibit was deciding how much of the Dunbar story to interweave with the Wright brothers' story. Too much information about Dunbar and visitors might not feel the need to venture to the actual Dunbar House; too little information about Dunbar and the park might appear to be marginalizing that part of its legislative mandate.⁴¹

An early draft of the WDIC exhibit did not find a balance that pleased all stakeholders. LaVerne Sci, the Ohio Historical Society employee who managed the Dunbar House from 1989 to 2009, raised concerns that the Dunbar story was getting lost. In her own words: "Dunbar wasn't included anywhere except the backroom, over here somewhere in the backroom. That's so typical, to take your minority and set him off in the corner somewhere. And I found that really—a little upsetting. And I explained it at the meeting at the time that this is a little bothersome because this park has a unique opportunity of really being the first integrated national park in the whole system. This park is unique."⁴²

³⁸ Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2001," 3; Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2002," 3; Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2003," 3.

³⁹ Honious, Oral History, 11.

⁴⁰ Honious, 9.

⁴¹ Honious, 9–10.

⁴² LaVerne Sci, Oral History, interview by Casey Huegel, May 14, 2015, 12, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

Sci enlisted the help of Judge Walter Rice, who had been instrumental in getting the park authorized and had served on the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission, to argue for greater coverage of Dunbar within the WDIC exhibit. The park incorporated this feedback, and the final exhibit deals more substantively with the poet. Twenty years later, Honious would offer this story as an example of the park's partnerships in action.⁴³

Park Audiovisual Materials

In the years leading up to the 2003 centennial, the park planned three audiovisual programs. The NPS Harpers Ferry Center oversaw the conceptual design for the films, then outsourced the films' production to media consulting firms. The plan called for a twenty-minute surround-sound film on the invention of flight, intended to be the core film shown at the WDIC. A second, shorter film would focus on Dunbar, and a third film, ten minutes long, would provide an orientation to the park's various components.⁴⁴ The Dunbar film was completed in time for the centennial celebration, and as of 2022, the park continues to show the film regularly on the second floor of the WDIC and at the Dunbar House visitor center.⁴⁵



Park Historian Edward Roach instructs the actor playing Orville Wright on printing techniques during the filming of the park orientation film, July 2005. Image: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

⁴³ Sci, 12–14; Honious, Oral History, 9–10.

⁴⁴ Michael Paskowsky, "Audiovisual Projects" (April 5, 2001), box 1, folder 11, Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁴⁵ Edward Roach, "Email: Park Films, Sent to Susan Ferentinos," June 1, 2020; Ann Honious, Comments to Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

The park's main film, on the invention of flight, ran into production difficulties and could not be completed by the 2003 centennial. Instead, an already-made film on the invention of flight showed for the first few years of the WDIC. The park-produced film, *On Great White Wings*, produced by the California firm Aperture Films and narrated by actor (and Dayton native) Martin Sheen, debuted in December 2006 and went on to win a Golden Eagle Award in the CINE awards competition for independent film. *On Great White Wings* continues to show at both of the park's interpretive centers in 2022.⁴⁶ The third film, orienting visitors to the various aviation sites within the park, appears never to have been made.⁴⁷

Paul Laurence Dunbar House

The Ohio Historical Society (OHS) site manager for the Dunbar House, LaVerne Sci, played an important role in how Dunbar is interpreted at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. Sci led the Dunbar House for twenty years, 1989–2009, and so was on hand to witness the transition of the house from a largely autonomous historic house museum to a component of the National Park System. In this position, she both helped ensure that the park dealt substantively with Dunbar as an important part of its reason for being and influenced that narrative into a more celebratory interpretation than may have otherwise occurred. In a 2015 interview, Sci described a lifelong passion for the literary work of Paul Laurence Dunbar, starting from the time her parents introduced her to his poetry while she was growing up in Florida. She moved to Dayton in the early 1970s when her husband was transferred to Wright-Patterson AFB. She became an active volunteer at the house and also participated in a Dunbar discussion group that was held at the site. At that time, the Dunbar House did not have a professional site manager, but rather a caretaker who lived in the house and opened it for visitors who came to see it. In 1987 or 1988, the OHS hired the first museum professional to staff the site, but she only stayed a short time. The job of site manager again opened in 1989, and Sci applied for the position.⁴⁸

Sci described the OHS's mostly hands-off approach to the Dunbar House:

My immediate boss [at the historical society] would give me a goal to reach in terms of visitation and numbers and what have you. And he did not bother to monitor my goal as I was reaching the goal. It didn't matter to him how I got there. . . . And I was told not necessarily to not do something, but to do it any way that I could. And I liked having the space and the autonomy to put things into place according to the needs of that situation. And to that

⁴⁶ *On Great White Wings* (Aperture Films, 2006); Mary McCarty, "Aviation Park Worthy of More Visitors," *Dayton Daily News*, March 25, 2007; Dave Larsen, "Film News," *Dayton Daily News*, July 20, 2007; Roach, "Email: Park Films, Sent to Susan Ferentinos," June 1, 2020; Honious, Comments on Draft 2.

⁴⁷ Roach, "Email: Park Films."

⁴⁸ Sci, Oral History.

extent OHS did not stand over me at all. I didn't see them again until they visited and there were times that a person wouldn't come from Columbus to the site unless there was a direct need. But without a need sometimes I wouldn't see people from Columbus for three and four months. It was like they weren't there, but— (laughs).⁴⁹

At the same time, in the early years of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, the NPS was not heavily involved with the Dunbar House either. The park's 1997 general management plan stated simply, "The Ohio Historical Society prefers its independence regarding the Dunbar property."⁵⁰ The result seems to have been that one individual, who understood Dunbar as a hero, had an outsized role in determining the stories told about Dunbar in the park's early years. Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP ranger Bob Petersen seemed to reference this situation in his 2016 oral history interview. "Well, over the years the Dunbar story has been a bit of a challenge. Dunbar has some very admirable qualities; he also has some qualities that are less than admirable, shall we say. And that fact was not always recognized [in interpretation]."⁵¹

Sci's enthusiasm for Dunbar often worked to the benefit of the park, as when Sci persistently advocated for more substantive treatment of the poet in the exhibits at the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center, or when she applied her passion to engaging visitors. Literary scholar Anne Trubek, author of *A Skeptic's Guide to Writers' Houses*, describes a visit to the Dunbar House in 2005: "Sci knows how to enthrall the audience. She performs. This is no dry recounting of birthdates and names. It's a one-woman show. Sometimes her eyes shut as she tries to remember what to say next, but her monologue isn't canned. She impersonates slave masters, parodies Dunbar's critics, and compares Reconstruction-era African American families to New Orleanians displaced by Katrina (it was only a month after the hurricane hit when I visited)."⁵²

At times, however, Sci's command of the site could interfere with a nuanced analysis of Dunbar as a man and a poet. For instance, for many years Dunbar's alcoholism and violence against women were not mentioned at the site, and even today, it is only mentioned in passing, despite it providing a possible entry into adding more women's history to the park's interpretation. (Women were a major force behind the temperance movement, arguing that alcohol made men violent and irresponsible husbands. Similarly, the first

⁴⁹ Sci, 22.

⁵⁰ National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan," 16.

⁵¹ Petersen, Oral History, 13.

⁵² Anne Trubek, *A Skeptic's Guide to Writers' Houses* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 118.

organized efforts against domestic and sexual violence occurred shortly after Dunbar's death.⁵³) Former Chief of Interpretation and Resource Manager Ann Honious recounted an early effort on the part of the NPS to include these aspects in its interpretation of Dunbar:

I think one of the lessons for Bill [Gibson] and also myself, since it was the two of us working on things, was one of the first things that was produced was a park brochure. And we developed that with Harpers Ferry—No, Denver Service Center, and the general management team helped us plan it. And we developed a brochure and did not share it with the partners and printed that and then shared it. And in that brochure, it mentioned Dunbar's alcoholism, and we ended up having to remove and pull back all those brochures and recraft the brochure to meet the concerns of the Ohio Historical Society and the Dunbar site and take out the reference to alcoholism and then reprint the brochure. So, it is something that wasn't addressed when we were there. The Ohio Historical Society was responsible for doing the interpretation and visitor experience, what OHS had developed for the site through their site manager, LaVerne Sci. But this was one aspect where we learned the park service wasn't by ourselves, and we needed to work with our partners and also address their concerns and their approaches to how they conveyed history through their programs.⁵⁴

Sci left the Dunbar House in 2009, and the Ohio Historical Society took a less active role in the site at about the same time. Since then, the National Park Service has slowly become more involved in the site's interpretation. The park's 2018 long-range interpretive plan identified the Dunbar House as a particular area of focus, stating: "Dunbar's story is at times overshadowed by the Wright brothers' legacy and the park's focus on aviation. The story of Dunbar's life and career, the impact of his poetry and correspondences, and the larger social context of his role in African American history, are also not fully represented through the park. It is important to strengthen Dunbar's interpretive presence, not only at the Dunbar House, but also throughout the nation in order to broaden the understanding and appreciation of Dunbar's unique accomplishments."⁵⁵

The plan proposed using the Dunbar visitor center as a site for not only interpreting Paul Laurence Dunbar, but African American literary and artistic achievements more generally. Doing so would require nurturing partnerships with the recently renamed Ohio History Connection, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, and the American Writers Museum, along with the Smithsonian Institution National

⁵³ See, for example, Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence: Boston, 1880–1960* (New York: Viking, 1988). My thanks to Hilary Iris Lowe for raising the question of the park's treatment of these aspects of Dunbar's life.

⁵⁴ Honious, Oral History, 7.

⁵⁵ Interpretive Solutions Inc., "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Long-Range Interpretive Plan," 33.

Museum of African American History and Culture, the Dayton African American Legacy Institute, local universities, and the Dayton Metro Library. New exhibits were recommended for the Dunbar visitor center, along with wayside exhibits throughout Dayton at other sites with significance to Dunbar's story, such as the site of his birth (the building no longer stands) and the Victoria Theater, where he first rose to national fame.⁵⁶



Interpretation of Paul Laurence Dunbar. Image: NPS Gallery.

Huffman Prairie Flying Field

Huffman Prairie Flying Field (HPFF) was the other park site highlighted as an interpretive priority in the 2018 long-range interpretive plan (LRIP). The site had been the subject of individualized planning in the early 2000s, and a combined cultural landscape, landscape

⁵⁶ Interpretive Solutions Inc., 33–38.

implementation, and interpretation plan was completed in 2002. NPS Midwest Regional Chief of Interpretation and Education Tom Richter headed up the interpretive elements of this earlier process.⁵⁷

The 2002 plan began by exploring the challenges of interpreting HPFF. The site was far removed from other park sites and visitor conveniences, it was on an active military base, it lacked a clearly defined entrance, rangers were not regularly on-site, and all interpretive media and visitor services had to be powered by solar energy.⁵⁸ The site's remoteness, however, could also be a strength. The plan argued: "The integrity of Huffman Prairie Flying Field's open, pastoral landscape with minimal distractions from modern developments will provide the key to meaningful visitor experiences. If design features and interpretive media do not overpower the landscape, the public will have opportunities to ponder the far-ranging consequences of the work of the Wright brothers at the flying field."⁵⁹

The 2002 plan called for the creation of a "gateway" to the site, providing wayfinding signs and a clearly marked entrance to assist visitors in locating the field. While these recommendations were not strictly interpretive, the plan acknowledged that logistical challenges were interfering with visitors' ability to access and absorb interpretation at the site. Interestingly, a similar argument would be made in 2018. As for actual interpretation, the 2002 plan called for a wayside exhibit, supplemented by an introductory interpretive message transmitted via a Traveler's Information Station radio frequency. This station would also provide directions to the field from the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center, about a mile away.⁶⁰

The park's 2018 LRIP identified HPFF as an interpretive priority, recognizing that although "the site remains one of the most compelling and authentic features that Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park has to offer," it had not yet reached its interpretive potential.⁶¹ Logistics were once again identified as the main impediment. According to the LRIP, "Finding the Flying Field is both difficult and even a bit intimidating"; it went on to note that "the entrance to the [air force] base does not always present a warm welcome."⁶² The gateway recommended in the 2002 HPFF interpretive plan had apparently not been built; the 2018 plan once again identified the lack of a gateway to the site as one of

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Fraterrigo et al., *From Pasture to Runway: Huffman Prairie Flying Field, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Cultural Landscape Report, Landscape Implementation Plan, Interpretation Plan* (Omaha: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2002), 117–35.

⁵⁸ Fraterrigo et al., *From Pasture to Runway*, 2002.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Fraterrigo et al., *From Pasture to Runway: Huffman Prairie Flying Field, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Cultural Landscape Report, Landscape Implementation Plan, Interpretation Plan* (Omaha: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2002), 123–24.

⁶⁰ Fraterrigo et al., 124–27. Digital copies of the Huffman Prairie Flying Field waysides are available through the NPS Technical Information Center web portal at <https://pubs.etic.nps.gov>.

⁶¹ Interpretive Solutions Inc., "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Long-Range Interpretive Plan," 21.

⁶² Interpretive Solutions Inc., 26.

its major challenges.⁶³ As a result of these various issues, the 2018 plan listed a series of map upgrades as its first recommendation for this unit of the park. The plan went on to urge regular maintenance of the HPFF waysides, noting that “the condition of the wayside exhibits is a reflection of the park.”⁶⁴ A “consistent ranger-led experience for visitors” was another priority identified for interpretation of the flying field.⁶⁵

School Programs

As recommended in the 2018 LRIP, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP utilizes its website to share curriculum materials with teachers. The website offers seventeen lesson plans and teacher guides for educating students about the Wright brothers and Dunbar, drawing on resources from both Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP and the Wright Brothers National Memorial in North Carolina. These lessons mostly focus on the Wright brothers’ history, the impact of aviation, and the mechanics of flight, although a few do attempt to incorporate Dunbar. One, entitled “Douglass,” focuses on Dunbar’s poem “Frederick Douglass.” The lesson plans include an activity, suggested questions for students, and proposed assessment criteria. The plans target students from elementary school through eighth grade. Langston Watras, a former art teacher and participant in Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP’s Teacher-Ranger-Teacher program, created many of the suggested lessons. Consequently, many of the offerings encourage students to draw and analyze art.⁶⁶

Other curriculum-based web content includes a teachers’ guide entitled *From Wheel to Wing*. After receiving a grant in 2000, Ann Honious collaborated with Sandy Eichhorn Hilt, the education services director for the *Dayton Daily News* and *Springfield News-Sun* on the guide, which includes the Wright brothers’ story as well as guided questions, instructions for teachers, and activity sheets. It also includes suggested supplemental materials. Two teachers, Vickie Hesler and Bern Schwieterman, created the activities, which range from science lessons on gravity to analyzing poetry to mapping a field trip.⁶⁷

⁶³ Interpretive Solutions Inc., 21.

⁶⁴ Interpretive Solutions Inc., 29.

⁶⁵ Interpretive Solutions Inc., 30.

⁶⁶ Interpretive Solutions Inc., 46; Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, “Curriculum Materials,” National Park Service, 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/daav/learn/education/classrooms/curriculummaterials.htm>; Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, “Teacher-Ranger-Teacher Lesson Plans,” National Park Service, 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/daav/learn/education/classrooms/trt-lesson-plans.htm>.

⁶⁷ Alex Heckman, “The Wright Cycle Company: Educating with the Wright Information,” *Wright-Dunbar Heritage News*, Summer 2001, copy available in folder 31, box 19, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections; National Park Service, “Wright Brothers Teacher’s Guide,” Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, March 25, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/daav/learn/education/classrooms/wright-brothers-teachers-guide.htm>; Sandy Eichhorn Hilt and Ann Deines, eds., “From Wheel to Wing: A Guide to Teaching the Invention of Flight,” n.d., <https://www.ebzb.org/educator-tool-kit/study-guidestheatre-etiquet/from-wheel-to-wing.pdf>.

The NPS Teaching with Historic Places program, developed in 2004, includes a lesson plan using Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP resources. The lesson, written by Dayton Aviation Heritage Chief of Education Judi Hart and Dayton History Vice-President of Museum Operations Alex Heckman, is available on the park website. It includes maps, images from the park, and text describing the Wright brothers, along with guided questions. The lesson also includes five activities designed to encourage students to complete further research into the Wright brothers and apply what they learn to their own lives. Suggested activities include making an advertisement for a Wright brothers' business, writing a letter to other aviation pioneers, developing their own invention, writing a paper on a personal mentor, and presenting a report to the class. The lesson ends with suggested supplemental materials.⁶⁸

In addition to the lesson plans, the education specialists and technicians working for the park and its partners have created programs for students from preschool through college, and these programs adhere to Ohio education standards. On-site activities for children include Mystery at the Museum, an event encouraging students to act as investigative journalists and hunt through the park for a missing object; Starbase, a program for fifth graders at Wright-Patterson AFB; National Kids to Parks Day; and Alley to Gallery, in which local kids add artwork to a garden exhibit. With the support of grants, the park has worked with YMCA summer camps, visited schools to teach about archeology and preservation, and funded transportation for school trips to the park. School programs targeting students include environmental programs, such as bike rides with rangers and bike safety demonstrations, which are covered in more detail in the next chapter. Park staff also participate in student activities outside of park boundaries. These efforts include National History Day, Tech Fest at Sinclair Community College, local summer camps, and various teacher workshops.⁶⁹

The 2018 LRIP for the park suggested ways to improve school programs. Recommendations included adding an outdoor classroom to Huffman Prairie Flying Field, to make it more accessible to student groups. The plan also proposed the creation of

⁶⁸ National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park: Where the Wright Brothers Conquered the Air (Teaching with Historic Places)," National Park Service, July 9, 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/dayton-aviation-heritage-national-historical-park-where-the-wright-brothers-conquered-the-air-teaching-with-historic-places.htm>; Alex Heckman, Comments on Draft 1 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, July 31, 2020.

⁶⁹ Lawrence Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2008" (National Park Service, 2008), 4, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Dean Alexander, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009–2011" (National Park Service, 2011), 7, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Dean Alexander, "State of the Park Report, FY 2016" (National Park Service, 2016), 3–5, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Dean Alexander, "State of the Park Report, FY 2014" (National Park Service, 2014), Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Pamela Dillon, "Aviation Park Earns a 'Best Idea' Grant: 'Digging into History' Program Wins Funding," *Dayton Daily News*, October 4, 2012, sec. South Dayton; Lawrence Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2004–2007" (National Park Service, 2007), 9, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Dean Alexander, "State of the Park Report, FY 2015" (National Park Service, 2015), 3, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

programming that focused on both the natural prairie and the historic aspects of the site. The LRIP noted that there were opportunities for Dunbar's story to be better incorporated into the curriculum for all students and that student groups should be a target audience for the Dunbar House.⁷⁰

Missing Elements of the Story

Reflecting on what, at that point, was a twenty-year career with Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, Ranger Bob Petersen stated: "We're telling a marvelous story. We're telling the story of people who have transformed the world. And that's what keeps me here. I find that fascinating. I can talk about all of world history from Dayton because everything has changed based on what these three individuals did. Each in their own way has transformed the world, and I find that very exciting. Part of the reason I came to Dayton as opposed to other possibilities is I liked the broad story that can be told from here."⁷¹

The legacies of powered flight and African American arts and letters do indeed present an impressive range of interpretive angles. Nevertheless, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's origins as a vehicle of local pride are still evident throughout its current interpretation. Current interpretation leans heavily toward the technology of flight and the biographies of the Wrights and Dunbar, while other interpretive topics remain underdeveloped. This section provides some examples of additional interpretive angles the park might consider moving forward.

⁷⁰ Interpretive Solutions Inc., "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Long-Range Interpretive Plan," 11–12, 32.

⁷¹ Petersen, Oral History, 11–12.



Ranger Bob Petersen leads an interpretative program at Huffman Prairie Flying Field, 2021.
Image: Courtesy of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

The Global Impact of Aviation

Both the 1997 and the 2018 interpretive plans list the impact of aviation as a fundamental interpretive theme of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. The 1997 plan refers to the invention of flight's effect "on the evolution of world civilization."⁷² The 2018 plan urges consideration of the ways the invention of flight "transformed travel, transportation, and warfare, thereby fundamentally changing the world."⁷³ Similar statements are made throughout the park's interpretive materials, but this legacy is only substantively explored at the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center, and there the focus is only on the ways that flight influenced warfare and space travel (which was itself a primarily military endeavor).

Yet aviation's impact is so much further reaching than this. Humanity's ability to travel by air has impacted almost every aspect of twenty-first-century life. How has affordable commercial air travel increased intercultural understanding; global foodways; world music, literature, and fashion? How did it contribute to the spread of AIDS and COVID-19? Closer to home, how did aviation contribute to the dominance of the United States in

⁷² National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan," 53.

⁷³ Interpretive Solutions Inc., "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Long-Range Interpretive Plan," 7–8.

international relations? How has it affected immigration to the United States? And how did it contribute to the creation of the very global economy that shifted manufacturing overseas and away from the factories of Dayton, Ohio, and cities like it all across the United States?

Climate Change

Climate change has become, of necessity, an increasing focus of the National Park Service. From the goal of remaining relevant to visitors to the mission of protecting the nation's natural and cultural resources, the NPS as a whole is making consistent efforts to educate the public about the dangers of global warming. Given this emphasis—and the spiraling effects of this phenomenon—the park's lack of discussion about the growing backlash to nonessential air travel or the carbon impact of flight is a lost opportunity to educate the public on a pressing issue while also proving the park's relevance. This interpretive avenue is also rich with opportunities to incorporate more STEM content into the park.

African American Culture

The history of African American artistic achievement is sorely lacking within the National Park System. The Paul Laurence Dunbar House is the only NPS unit dedicated to African American poetry; there is no unit dedicated to African American fiction. Being a lone example of African American literary achievement is a heavy responsibility to bear. Nevertheless, the 2018 LRIP embraced this reality when it called for reimagining a site that not only focuses on Dunbar's life story “but also includes the larger context of Black literary, cultural, and artistic achievements.”⁷⁴ The plan's recommended partnerships could greatly assist in this effort, and the result could be a distinctive interpretive element of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP that draws an entirely new demographic to the city and the park.

Similarly, there is potentially rich interpretive ground to be found in partnering with other NPS units dedicated to African American culture. New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park focuses on an African American art form that overlaps historically with Dunbar's lifetime. What new insights can be gained by considering Dunbar's poetry and the genre of turn-of-the-twentieth-century jazz in tandem? Taking a different interpretive direction, the sensitive issue of African American dialect is ripe for interpretation. Efforts to represent distinctive African American patterns of speech have a troubled history, due to European Americans' historical caricature of these patterns in furthering racist stereotypes. As such, Dunbar's choice to write in dialect is often interpreted as a decision (or forced choice) to pander to European American audiences. But are there other interpretations? What are the linguistic roots of African American (and European American) speech

⁷⁴ Interpretive Solutions Inc., 33.

patterns? What insight can be gained when we consider Dunbar's representation of African American speech alongside the Gullah language commemorated in the NPS Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor? What did Dunbar's contemporaries Mary McLeod Bethune, Carter G. Woodson, and George Washington Carver (or his elders Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington)—all of whom have NPS units dedicated to their lives—have to say about African American patterns of speech?

Socioeconomic Factors

Unlike many cities in the Rustbelt, Dayton has had its fair share of both inventors and laborers who built the products of those inventions. While Dayton's aviation heritage has heretofore been told mostly as a story of inventors, the addition of the Wright Company factory buildings provides an exciting opportunity to interpret the laborers as well. Edward Roach's book *The Wright Company: From Invention to Industry* provides the baseline research for such an interpretive focus. The remaining hurdle is rehabilitating the site to be safe and accessible for visitors.

Also within the realm of socioeconomics, how would the park's interpretation change if, rather than telling the story of the Wrights and Dunbar as a lesson in interracial friendship, the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center presented the stories of these men in juxtaposition to each other? In both narratives, we would see men who believed in themselves and their vision in the face of significant evidence to the contrary. We would touch upon the American mythos of individuals from humble beginnings ultimately achieving fame and fortune through perseverance and self-confidence. Interestingly, we would see two stories of people providing for their parents in old age and living in intergenerational households. But do the narratives diverge when we consider the socioeconomic realities facing each party? Is there anything in the Wrights' career that is comparable to Dunbar's decision to write in dialect? Is there anything in Dunbar's career that is comparable to the Wrights' ultimately finding justice in the court system regarding their claim of inventing the airplane? What are we to make of Dunbar's decision to represent his success by moving to a predominantly white, middle-class neighborhood, while the Wrights chose to represent their success by moving out of the interracial neighborhood they had lived in for forty years and heading outside the city limits to a wealthy, exclusively white suburb?

Women

An interpretive shift away from the technological aspects of flight to other aspects of the Wright and Dunbar stories can potentially open the door to incorporating more women's history into the park. As the 2018 interpretive themes hint, Matilda Dunbar is a captivating historical agent whose life can shed light not only on her son's career but also on the strength

and ingenuity required of African American women in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries to move beyond the limitations placed on them. What was Matilda's relationship to literacy? And whether or not she herself could read, what would it have meant for a woman raised in slavery to be the parent of a man of letters? How do her efforts to preserve her son's legacy after his death relate to the larger history of women as keepers of memory at the turn of the twentieth century? Similarly, what information about the past can be gleaned from a gender analysis of Paul Laurence Dunbar's poetry? And can the more dangerous aspects of his life—his violence toward women and his alcoholism—provide an entry point for a discussion of turn-of-the-twentieth-century women's political activism with regard to temperance, married women's rights, domestic violence, and suffrage?

With regard to Wilbur and Orville Wright, how did the women in their life—their sister Katharine and assorted housekeepers—enable them to become the great inventors they became? How did their gender contribute to their ability to invent the airplane? How would remaining unmarried, owning a bicycle shop, and traveling back and forth to the outer reaches of North Carolina have played out differently for a man and a woman in this era? What insight into historic gender roles can be gained by analyzing Orville's reaction to Katharine's marriage through the lens of patriarchy?

* * *

To be sure, the park has made some efforts to interpret all of these general topics. Park management is also already thinking about how to further explore them, as evidenced by the 2018 LRIP. Quite likely, executing the recommendations of that plan were stymied by the COVID-19 pandemic that struck less than two years after the LRIP was finalized. Most of the permanent interpretive features of the park are fifteen to twenty years old and so will soon be replaced. Thus the park is well positioned to embrace a broader perspective on the stories to be told when we consider the legacies of Dunbar and the Wright brothers.

Conclusion

In the early years of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, the park generally deferred to the existing interpretation created by park partners. Nevertheless, the National Park Service's financial and technical assistance encouraged Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's partners to upgrade their facilities and interpretive programs in anticipation of the 2003 Centennial of Flight. In recent years, a new long-range interpretive plan (2018) has assisted the park in focusing on the interpretive areas it oversees and bringing the content of these interpretive elements more in line with contemporary scholarship and larger agency goals. The result is an ambitious vision that is more relevant to contemporary audiences while deemphasizing some of park's more traditional approaches.

CHAPTER TEN

Serving the Visitors

As we have already seen, certain characteristics of Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park (NHP) have played an ongoing, significant role in the park's management. These characteristics are the park's multiple partners, the dispersed nature of the park's resources, the core parcel's location in a traditionally underresourced part of the city, and the park's intended role as a generator of income and identity for the city of Dayton. These characteristics have influenced the park's approach to visitor service and outreach.

This chapter begins with an overview of park visitors, based on visitation numbers and visitor studies. It then considers two aspects of visitor services that have occupied a great deal of park staff's energy and time: outreach to the park's multiple audiences and facilitating circulation among park sites. It concludes with discussions of accessibility and park concessions.

Park Visitation

Understanding park visitation can be complicated at Dayton Aviation Heritage because park sites are spread between so many partners. Huffman Prairie is unstaffed much of the time, and visitation to that site is not consistently tracked. Similarly, Dayton History tracks visits to Carillon Historical Park and reports those to the NPS, but they do not tease out how many of their guests specifically visited the John W. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers National Museum, which is also part of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. In the course of this project, numerous park staff expressed the opinion that visitation numbers at Carillon Historical Park, when added to the national historical park visitation statistics, can sometimes obscure information about visitors to other areas of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. Readers should keep this situation in mind during the following discussion.

Table 10.1
Visitation to Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, by Year

Years	Park Visitors
1996	39,262
1997	34,706
1998	38,308
1999	32,882
2000	36,038
2001	48,489
2002	40,246
2003	100,616
2004	50,569
2005	49,100
2006	51,771
2007	54,827
2008	53,292
2009	58,301
2010	63,961
2011	68,048
2012	65,999
2013	59,274
2014	57,565
2015	73,588
2016	95,334
2017	99,700
2018	93,541
2019	94,709
Total	1,460,126

Source: “Stats Report Viewer,” National Park Service, Integrated Resource Management Applications (IRMA), January 2020, <https://preview.tinyurl.com/yboqb5wj>.

So far in its history, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP welcomed its largest annual visitation in 2003, the centennial of the Wrights’ first flight, with 100,616 people exploring at least one of the park’s resources. However, between 2016 and the COVID-19 lockdown of 2020–21, the park’s numbers neared that record, with annual visitation between 93,000 and 100,000 for each of the four years between the start of 2016 and the end of 2019. This

level, however, remains substantially below the annual visitation anticipated during park development. Based on comparisons with other national park units with similar characteristics, a 2001 study projected that annual visitation would be between 300,000 and 400,000 each year. However, it is not clear how much stock the NPS took in that estimate. As long-time Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Ranger Bob Petersen has pointed out, the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center—opened in 2003—does not have the capacity to handle that many visitors, and the Dunbar House and the Wright Cycle Company building can accommodate far fewer visitors than the WDIC.¹

Between the beginning of 2004 and the end of 2008, annual visitation to the park averaged about 51,900, with a general trend of incremental increases each year. There was a roughly 5,000-person increase between 2008 and 2009 and another roughly 5,000-person increase the following year. Between the beginning of 2010 and the end of 2014, annual visitation averaged about 63,000. Another spike in visitation occurred in 2015, when visitation increased 10,000 from the previous five-year average (and 16,000 from the previous year alone), to 73,588. The following year, 2016, the spike was even greater, with nearly 22,000 more visitors than the previous year. Put another way, in the course of three years (2014–16), annual visitation went from an average in the low sixty-thousands to the ninety-thousands.²

The reasons for the rapid increase in visitation around 2009 are not entirely clear. This was the year that Hawthorn Hill and the Wright Company factory were added to the park boundaries. However, the factory building has never yet been opened to the public. Hawthorn Hill was already open to the public by the time it was included in the park's boundaries, so its visitation numbers simply became part of the park's, beginning in September 2009. This addition accounts for some, but not all, of the increase in visitors. Visits to Hawthorn Hill added only about 600 visitors to the 2009 visitation (since visitation statistics only combined for the last four months of the year) and accounted for slightly less than 1,800 visits in 2010. Changes in management of the Dunbar House may also have had something to do with the 2008–10 visitor increase. In this period, the Ohio Historical Society ceded management of the site to Dayton History, and new marketing efforts may have contributed to an increase in visitation. Visitors at this site numbered 600 in 2009 (when the house was closed from January through March) and 1,170 in 2010. Visitation statistics from earlier years are not available, however, so it is difficult to know if these numbers represent an increase from previous levels.³

¹ “Stats Report Viewer,” National Park Service, Integrated Resource Management Applications (IRMA), January 2020, <https://preview.tinyurl.com/yboqb5wj>; Burgess and Niple Ltd., “Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Multimodal Transportation Study” (Dayton: Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission, October 2001), 15, National Park Service Technical Information Center, <https://pubs.nps.gov/>; Bob Petersen, Comments to Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

² “Stats Report Viewer.”

³ Visitation levels for Hawthorn Hill and the Dunbar House were provided by staff at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP.



Actor Tom Hanks visits Huffman Prairie Flying Field in April 2016, shown here talking to Ranger Ryan Qualls (left) and park superintendent Dean Alexander (right). Image: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

The causes for the increase in visitation around 2015 are also not entirely apparent. David McCullough's book *The Wright Brothers* was published in 2015, and in 2016 McCullough and actor Tom Hanks visited Dayton as part of a fundraising campaign at Wright State University. The pair had recently signed an agreement to make an HBO miniseries based on McCullough's Wright brothers book, so while in Dayton, they also visited Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP sites.⁴

Possibly the publicity surrounding the book and the pair's visit to the park contributed to increased visitation. The park's 2018 long-range interpretive plan did attribute a brief spike in visitation in 2017 to the book's popularity, and ranger Bob Petersen commented in 2022 that park visitors still regularly mention McCullough's book. However, it seems unlikely that the book would be solely responsible for the ongoing increase in visitation.⁵

A more likely explanation for the increased park visitation beginning in 2016 was new programming at Carillon Historical Park. Beginning in 2016, Dayton History began offering extended hours each December as part of a program called "A Carillon

⁴ "Tom Hanks Helps Launch Film Center—Actor and Author David McCullough Come to Wright State University," *Dayton Daily News*, April 20, 2016.

⁵ David G. McCullough, *The Wright Brothers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015); Interpretive Solutions Inc., "Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Long-Range Interpretive Plan" (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, December 2018), 10; Bob Petersen, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

Christmas.” This program significantly increased visitation to Carillon Historical Park, which includes the Wright Brothers National Museum and the Wright Flyer III, also part of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP.⁶

* * *

A 2004 study of visitors to Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, conducted by the University of Idaho, found that the majority (58 percent) were from the state of Ohio. Michigan and Indiana, the next most represented states, each drew 3 percent. The average age of visitors was 50.9 years old, with the majority (52 percent) in the 41–70 age group and 21 percent under the age of fifteen. Visitors were overwhelmingly European American (96 percent) and primary speakers of English (98 percent). Gender breakdown was 51 to 49 percent, men to women. Sixty-two percent of visitors came to the park in a family unit, 17 percent came by themselves, and 14 percent came with friends.⁷

That year, according to another study (that most likely used the same data), most visitors spent less than an hour at the park. In this report, 39 percent of the visitors were from the local area. Of the park visitors from out of town, 24 percent came to Dayton with the primary purpose of visiting the park. Twenty-six percent came to visit friends or family, and 22 percent came primarily to visit the National Museum of the US Air Force. Visitors to the park in 2004 added an estimated \$2.2 million to the local economy, of which \$1.22 million was directly attributable to the presence of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. Again, these figures are based on 2004 data, and so it is likely that at least some visitor demographics have changed since the data were collected. Similarly, that year, annual park visitation was 50,569, so the park’s impact on the local economy has quite likely more than doubled, to account for the near doubling of visitor numbers, as well as inflation.⁸ A 2014 article in the *Dayton Daily News*, which did not identify the source of its information but did include quotations from Park Superintendent Dean Alexander, stated that at that time it was estimated that park visitors contributed \$3.6 million to the local economy.⁹

⁶ My thanks to Alex Heckman, vice president of museum operations at Dayton History, for pointing out this likely explanation for the increase in visitation; visitation statistics for the Wright Brothers National Museum, shared by staff at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, support Heckman’s explanation. They point to a significant increase at this park resource in particular, beginning in 2016.

⁷ Mark F. Manni and Steven J. Hollenhorst, “Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Visitor Study, Summer 2004, Volume 1” (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Social Science Program, Visitor Services Project, April 2005), 5–12.

⁸ Daniel J. Stynes, “Impacts of Visitor Spending on the Local Economy: Dayton Aviation National Historical Park, 2004,” Report (Dayton: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, May 2006), 2–3, National Park Service Electronic Technical Information Center, <https://pubs.nps.gov>.

⁹ Cornelius Frolik, “Aviation Park Tourists Worth \$3.6M to Region,” *Dayton Daily News*, March 12, 2014.

Public Outreach

Potential Audiences

Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP has multiple audiences, as most public venues do, and the challenge of making these multiple constituencies feel welcome at the park has prompted the staff to pursue outreach on a variety of fronts. To begin with, there are the fans of aviation specifically or of the history of technology more generally. They are a powerful audience for the park. This constituency both played a key role in the park's creation and comprised its core visitor base at least in the early years of the park. This latter claim is extrapolated from the visitor profile of 2004, which found the average visitor was part of an older white couple or family unit and that nearly half the out-of-town visitors came to Dayton with a primary purpose of either visiting the park or the US Air Force Museum.¹⁰

Another important audience for the park is composed of local residents without a particular interest in the history of aviation. Because of the role of aeronautics and the US Air Force in the local economy, Dayton probably has a higher-than-average number of residents who are interested in aviation history and technology, but this description most certainly does not cover the entire city. Other local residents might be drawn to the park as a way to learn more about local history or African American history, or as an option for leisure time.

There are multiple important reasons to pursue local audiences. As a public agency, the National Park Service operates its units for the benefit of all, so providing a resource for local communities to regularly enjoy fits solidly within the agency's mission. Cultivating local stakeholders can also generate political capital; citizens can advocate for the park because its benefit to them is clear. Finally, local audiences demonstrate the NPS's relevance, and relevance has been a major goal of the agency in the last fifteen years, as detailed in Chapter 2. The agency's increasing presence in urban areas is largely a result of this effort to be relevant.

In particular, residents of the core parcel's West Dayton neighborhood and the neighborhood surrounding the Dunbar House are a particularly important potential audience. Neighborhood revitalization was an integral part of the original vision for the park. This vision, along with NPS efforts to promote a "culture of collaboration" with local groups, prompted Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP to include residents of West Dayton in park planning and visitation efforts from the beginning. Bob Petersen, the first permanent ranger hired by the park, remembered in a 2016 oral history interview that the park had two seasonal rangers before he arrived and that one was tasked with outreach to the residents of the park's surrounding neighborhood:

¹⁰ Manni and Hollenhorst, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Visitor Study 2004, v. 1," iii, 6; Stynes, "Impacts of Visitor Spending: Dayton Aviation NHP," 2–3.

Well, part of what Jerry Kessens had been hired to do was go out and meet the neighbors, and stay in contact with the neighbors. He was very good at doing that. He was a very outgoing, gregarious person. He knew everybody in the neighborhood, and that's exactly what we needed at the time. We were a new entity in a black neighborhood, and we needed to let people know that we were not there walking around with badges ready to arrest them. They needed to know that we were there as a partner to help preserve and protect. So there was a lot of that going on.¹¹

Outreach to Aviation Lovers

The very design of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP enables the park to serve visitors interested in aviation. The park is a part of the Aviation Trail and the National Aviation Heritage Area; key parts of the park are located on an air force base. The park also benefits from its proximity to the National Museum of the US Air Force; in 2004, a quarter of nonlocal visitors came to the park as part of a trip whose primary purpose was to visit the air force museum. Because of this structure, much of the outreach to this potential audience occurs in the form of information sharing among local aviation sites. Visitors to any local aviation site learn about the park through information about either the Aviation Trail or the heritage area or via park brochures available at related sites.¹²

Air shows provide another obvious opportunity for park outreach. The Dayton Air Show has been held each summer since the early 1970s and includes a vast exhibit area as well as live aviation performances. The park regularly has a presence at the show, with rangers available to discuss the park and its resources with air show attendees. From 2000 to 2003, the park also had an exhibit at Sun-N-Fun, the nation's second-largest general aviation event. Oshkosh, Wisconsin, hosts the country's largest aviation event, the Experimental Aircraft Association's annual convention. In 2010, the US Department of the Interior assigned Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP the responsibility of representing the department at this event, and park staff have created at least two portable exhibits over the years to be used specifically at the Oshkosh gathering.¹³

On occasion, the park itself has hosted special events related to early aviation. Wright "B" Flyer Inc., a local nonprofit, was founded in 1975 to construct a look-alike model of the Wright Company's Model B aircraft, the brothers' first mass-produced plane

¹¹ Bob Petersen, Oral History, interview by Casey Huegel, December 1, 2016, 3, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

¹² Manni and Hollenhorst, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Visitor Study 2004, v. 1," iii.

¹³ Timothy R. Gaffney, "From Homebuilt to State of the Art: The Evolution of the AirVenture Show," *Dayton Daily News*, August 6, 2006; Dean Alexander, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009–2011" (National Park Service, 2011), 5, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Bob Petersen, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, February 15, 2022.

(1910). The look-alike model, built to modern safety standards, was completed in 1982, and since then, the organization has been exhibiting it locally and at air shows to educate people about the early mechanics of flight. The organization owns another look-alike, the Valentine Flyer, and for many years, this flyer was displayed at Huffman Prairie Flying Field during the summer, until the costs of doing so became prohibitive.¹⁴

Outreach Related to Science, Nature, and the Outdoors

Within the world of history museums, there is a decided trend toward incorporating STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) topics into programming. This development is the result of multiple circumstances. To some extent, the increase in STEM programming is a response to visitor interests and needs. Precollegiate curriculum standards tend to emphasize STEM topics over the humanities, and to keep class trips coming to history museums, educational programming must address the standards. Similarly, grant funding for STEM-related programming can be more readily available, prompting museums to design program components that qualify for these sources of funding. Finally, over the past decade, museum professionals are approaching a general consensus that climate change is the most pressing issue of our day (although 2020 certainly raised other contemporary crises that might now challenge that consensus). Given this reality, incorporating discussions of the environment, sustainability, and the role of innovation and technology in solving global problems becomes simply another part of fulfilling museums' missions.¹⁵

Although national park units are less dependent on private grants than most museums are, they have an ongoing interest in relevance, as we have seen. One element of the NPS's efforts to stay relevant to the American public has not yet received much attention in this administrative history: environmental education. The 2001 report *Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century*, discussed in Chapter 2, listed seven areas of focus for the National Park Service in the twenty-first century. Of these, one was conservation of the country's biodiversity, and two additional areas involved public engagement with the

¹⁴ Timothy R. Gaffney, *The Dayton Flight Factory: The Wright Brothers and the Birth of Aviation* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2014), 145; Ann Honious, *What Dreams We Have: The Wright Brothers and Their Hometown of Dayton, Ohio* (Fort Washington, PA: Eastern National, 2003), 109; Wright "B" Flyer Inc., "About Us," 2020, <http://www.wright-b-flyer.org/about-us/>; Alexander, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009-2011," 4–5.

¹⁵ Catherine Hughes and Allison Cosby, "Exploring the Intersections of Science and History Learning," *Journal of Museum Education* 41, no. 3 (September 2016): 174–84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10598650.2016.1193306>; Leah S. Glaser, "Let's Sustain This: A Review," *Public Historian* 36, no. 3 (August 2014): 130–44, <https://doi.org/10.1525/tph.2014.36.3.130>; Maxwell L. Anderson, "The Crisis in Art History: Ten Problems, Ten Solutions," *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation* 27, no. 4 (December 2011): 337, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973762.2011.622238>; The National WWII Museum, "STEM Resources," n.d., <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/educator-resources/stem-resources>.

environment. The report urged the NPS to advance principles of environmental sustainability and to collaborate with other recreation systems to create “an outdoor recreation network accessible to all Americans.”¹⁶

Although Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP has generally pursued its relevance through means other than environmental engagement, there have been enough outreach efforts involving STEM elements to suggest that the park is responding to larger trends and priorities within the agency. Although most of these efforts have occurred since 2010, as early as 2006–8, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP rangers were leading bicycle tours to Wright sites throughout Dayton, combining historical interpretation and outdoor recreation. In 2015, these ranger-led bike tours continued, including one held specifically for Oakwood High School students. Beginning in 2011, interpretive staff developed a fourth-grade curriculum to teach students about native plants and involve them in adding native plantings throughout the park. Ranger-led dog walks and prairie workshops have been conducted at Huffman Prairie Flying Field, and in at least 2012 and 2014, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP sent representatives to a two-day STEM education event known as TechFest. Finally, throughout the 2010s, the park hosted regular bicycle safety workshops and helmet fittings for area children.¹⁷

The 2016 recollections of Park Education Technician Karen Rosga suggest that at least some of these activities were an attempt to reach new audiences as well as provide environmental education. She describes the Huffman Prairie dog walks, in part, as historical programming:

We started out by gathering at Simms Station, and I had photographs and quotes from diaries and correspondence between various Wright family members to talk about Wilbur’s dog Flyer that he sort of adopted when he was in France, and then Scipio, which came into Orville’s life. And I realized that a really cool part of the story was that these dogs came into these men’s lives at times when they really needed something or somebody, at really hard times in their lives. Now that’s something that most people get. . . . It was for Wilbur being alone in a country where he didn’t speak the language and people were ridiculing what he and his brother had done. Then in the process of putting the

¹⁶ Peggy O’Dell, “Redefining the National Park Service Role in Urban Areas: Bringing the Parks to the People,” *Journal of Leisure Research* 48, no. 1 (2016): 9, <https://doi.org/DOI:10.18666/jlr-2016-v48-i1-7168>; Glaser, “Let’s Sustain This”; National Park System Advisory Board, “Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century” (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2001), 19–21, 23–26, <https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/DownloadFile/430527>, quotation from 9.

¹⁷ Lawrence Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2004–2007” (National Park Service, 2007), 8, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Lawrence Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2008” (National Park Service, 2008), 4, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Dean Alexander, “State of the Park Report, FY 2015” (National Park Service, 2015), 3, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Alexander, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2009–2011,” 7; Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, “2012 Calendar of Events” (2012), folder 2012, Dean Alexander Documents, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Staff Records; Dean Alexander, “State of the Park Report, FY 2014” (National Park Service, 2014), Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Petersen, Comments on Draft 2.

airplane together, the hose breaks, he's covered with scalded water on one part of his body and just awful, awful stuff. And yet along comes this little stray dog into his life and makes things better. And likewise Scipio came into Orville's life after Wilbur's death. So starting in the parking lot I just shared pictures and quotes, little snippets of their story, and then we would walk across the prairie along the flight line and stop and talk about their use of the prairie. So the prairie itself did not have a specific connection to the dogs, but they were a way to get those people into the story of the Wrights through that initial connection with the dogs.¹⁸

Further evidence of the park's interest in using the Wright brothers' story as a way to do outreach related to science, nature, and the outdoors can be found in the 2018 Long-Range Interpretative Plan (LRIP). The Dayton Regional STEM Center was one of the seven nonpartner community groups that were invited to serve on the advisory committee to the plan, signaling the park's interest in expanding interpretive offerings in this area. In the final report, the park's interpretive themes engage a language reminiscent of STEM education, using phrases such as "innovation and ingenuity," "experimental risk-taking," "a scientific approach to solving complex problems," and "persistent application of the scientific method." In addition, one of the LRIP's key recommendations was for the park to become involved in a local makerspace in order "to learn new ways of interpreting math and science" and "to reach tech-focused audiences."¹⁹

Outreach to Local Residents

Outreach related to science, nature, and STEM was largely focused on local residents, but the park's efforts to welcome its neighbors went beyond programming related to nature and recreation. The park's other outreach encompassed both special programming and simply establishing the park's presence at local events, in order to spread the word about its attractions.

A significant amount of special programming courted visitors who would not necessarily visit a historic site out of curiosity about the past but might visit for a specific, not particularly history-related, event. The bicycle safety workshops mentioned in the previous section fall into this category. Other examples include allowing local community groups such as the African American Visual Artist Guild, the Women of Color Quilters Network, and the Major Taylor Cycling Club to use the Dunbar House and the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center for monthly meetings. In 2014, the park also hosted a StoryCorps booth at the park for three weeks. StoryCorps is a national program of pop-up

¹⁸ Karen Rosga, Oral History, interview by Casey Huegel, December 22, 2016, 18-19, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

¹⁹ Interpretive Solutions Inc., "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Long-Range Interpretive Plan," 75, 7-8, 44-46, quotations from 7, 8, 44.

interview stations, where individuals can interview each other to learn about each other's lives. In the words of the organization, "We do this to remind one another of our shared humanity, to strengthen and build the connections between people, to teach the value of listening, and to weave into the fabric of our culture the understanding that everyone's story matters. At the same time, we are creating an invaluable archive for future generations."²⁰

From 2003 to 2015, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP participated in a community-wide event called Urban Nights, held twice yearly in May and September. The events featured activities, performances, and tours of local institutions and were an effort to bring people to downtown Dayton, the Oregon District, and the west side in the evenings. The event's title suggests the effort was particularly aimed at residents of Dayton-area suburbs. The Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center stayed open into the evening, and rangers provided special programming. Although full statistics are not available, in May and September 2011, the park's Urban Nights programming attracted over a thousand visitors to the park on each of those evenings. The Urban Nights events were discontinued in 2015, but the west-side neighborhood enhancement organization Wright Dunbar, Inc. instituted a similar evening event in West Dayton called "Walk the Walk," which the park participated in.²¹

Efforts to raise the park's profile within Dayton have also extended beyond the boundaries of the park. They have involved information booths at area events, such as the US Air Force Tattoo Ceremony and the Ohio State Fair. The park has also staffed an information table at Second Street Market, the local farmers' market operated by Five Rivers Metro Parks. In addition, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP maintains interpretive wayside exhibits throughout the city at non-park sites associated with the Wright brothers and Dunbar.²²

²⁰ Alexander, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP State of the Park Report, FY 2014," 3–4; Alexander, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP State of the Park Report, FY 2015," 3; StoryCorps, "About StoryCorps," accessed June 2, 2020, <https://storycorps.org/about>.

²¹ Alexander, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009–2011," 5; Alexander, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP State of the Park Report, FY 2014"; Amelia Robinson, "Downtown Urban Nights Events Discontinued," *Dayton Daily News*, n.d., <https://www.daytondailynews.com/events/downtown-urban-nights-events-discontinued/8iSvFUhixyVNtXg3zE9QKN/>; Bob Petersen, Comments on Draft 2 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, March 6, 2022.

²² Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2004–2007," 8; Alexander, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009–2011."



A crowd attending Urban Nights programming in the park plaza, 2012.
Image: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

Outreach Related to Dunbar

As discussed in the previous chapter, the 2018 LRIP identified the Paul Laurence Dunbar House as a resource whose full interpretive potential had not been reached. The plan outlined a vision where the Dunbar House became a destination for audiences seeking to learn more about African American arts and letters more generally.²³

In 2016, Ranger Bob Petersen offered additional ideas for outreach related to this part of the park:

On the Dunbar side of the story, I think there's a real potential as well. Dunbar is not an individual who is as well-known today as he once was, because the nature of our society has changed. There was a time when you could pick up newspapers and read pieces of poetry; you cannot do that today... And so, poets as a whole are not as well-known as they once were. Dunbar's name is definitely not.

²³ Interpretive Solutions Inc., "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Long-Range Interpretive Plan."

There's a real potential for greater visibility on that front. There have been two academic seminars focused on Dunbar and his work. The last one took place out in California at Stanford. Well, one of the things I'd love to see is a third one to be held in Dayton. We have the resources here; many of the experts on Dunbar have never been to the Dunbar House (laughs), so there is an opportunity to share the resources here, to increase the visibility of Dayton, of the national park, and to further the legacy of a poet like Paul Laurence Dunbar who is an extremely talented individual.²⁴

In spring 2022, Park Historian Edward Roach commented on new scholarship related to Dunbar. *Love, Activism, and the Respectable Life of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*, by African American studies scholar Tara L. Green, had just been published earlier in 2022, and *Paul Laurence Dunbar: The Life and Times of a Caged Bird*, by literary scholar Gene Andrew Jarrett, was then forthcoming—it was released in June 2022. Roach saw this new scholarship both enabling park staff to update their interpretation of Dunbar and potentially attracting new audiences to the park.²⁵ However, as of mid-2022, none of these outreach ideas had been substantively pursued.

Social Media Outreach

As a federal agency, with its attendant bureaucracy, the National Park Service has traditionally been a late adopter of digital outreach tools. For instance, in the early years of Web 2.0—where the internet shifted from being primarily about conveying information to a more interactive model relying heavily on social media, blogs, and comment fields—NPS staff computers actually restricted access to social media sites, not yet grasping their potential for outreach and engagement. The agency's use of social media increased after 2011, when NPS Director Jonathan Jarvis sent a memo to agency personnel advocating social media as an interpretive and outreach tool.²⁶

In the lead-up to the NPS centennial in 2016, the agency made efforts to harness the potential of social media. In 2014, the NPS partnered with the National Parks Foundation to introduce an ambitious public engagement campaign largely (but not exclusively) based on digital outreach tools, which would run from 2015 through the 2016 centennial year. The campaign, "Find Your Park," sought "to reintroduce the national parks and the work of the

²⁴ Petersen, Oral History, 25–26.

²⁵ Edward Roach, Oral History, interview by Susan Ferentinos, May 18, 2022, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park; Tara T. Green, *Love, Activism, and the Respectable Life of Alice Dunbar-Nelson* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022); Gene Andrew Jarrett, *Paul Laurence Dunbar: The Life and Times of a Caged Bird* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), <https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691150529/paul-laurence-dunbar>.

²⁶ Zachary D. Miller and Wayne Freimund, "Virtual Visitors: Facebook Users and National Parks," *Journal of Park & Recreation Administration* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 137, <https://doi.org/10.18666/JPra-2017-V35-I3-8010>.

National Park Service to a new generation of Americans, inviting them to visit and get involved.” The initiative spawned a hashtag (#FindYourPark) and a website (FindYourPark.com), and encouraged NPS units and programs to greatly increase their online presence.²⁷

Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP established a park Facebook page in 2009 and joined Twitter in 2012, but they were not regularly used. The 2018 LRIP stated that the park “has an early stage social media footprint that can only continue to grow and thrive.” The interpretive plan had a full section devoted to using social media to engage with audiences online, outlining listening and talking strategies as a means of increasing engagement. It also included eight specific recommendations for expanding the park’s social media presence, which included completing a formal social media policy for the park (then in progress), tracking engagement statistics, and creating a park-specific hashtag.²⁸

As discussed in Chapter 7, “Park Management,” the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent closure of public facilities seem to have been a watershed moment for the NPS’s embrace of digital outreach. At Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, when management assistant Nicholas Georgeff was asked about the park closure due to COVID, he highlighted the park’s efforts to reach visitors with digital tools during the pandemic: “As the pandemic went on, the park was able to have a greater social media presence, to where you could have ranger-led presentations on it. . . . And if you wanted to learn about the [development of] flight, you can have a three-to-five-minute presentation on the flights at Huffman Prairie. . . . So, we’re trying to leverage technology and come up to the happy medium of in-person-versus-technology. . . . And so, I would not say that the park was closed to visitation during the whole timeframe [of the COVID-19 lockdown].”²⁹

Park documents support Georgeff’s assessment. During the pandemic, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP engaged a digital strategy consulting firm, Richmond Street Digital, to assist in developing a plan for the park’s digital outreach.³⁰ Park staff also initiated at least two social media campaigns related to current events. In June 2020, Black Lives Matter protests were happening throughout the country in response to the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP shared a video on social media of Ranger Bev Breiser, an African American woman, recounting her own experiences with police profiling. The video received over 7,000 views. In spring 2021, the park

²⁷ NPF News, “National Park Service Announces Public Engagement Campaign as Centerpiece of 2016 Centennial,” National Park Foundation, March 24, 2014, <https://www.nationalparks.org/about-foundation/newsroom/national-park-service-announces-public-engagement-campaign-centerpiece>.

²⁸ “Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Facebook Page,” n.d., <https://www.facebook.com/DaytonAviationNPS>; Interpretive Solutions Inc., “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Long-Range Interpretive Plan,” 39–44.

²⁹ Nicholas Georgeff, Oral History I, interview by Susan Ferentinos, November 4, 2021, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

³⁰ Greg Hughes, “Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Digital Strategy” (Richmond Street Digital, March 2021), Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Staff Records.

developed a plan for social media outreach related to the Mars Perseverance mission, which involved the first human-controlled exploration of Mars. Thus one positive outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was the initiation of more concerted efforts to reach potential audiences using digital tools.

Circulation among Park Sites

Transportation Planning

Because Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was originally composed of four noncontiguous sites (the Wright Cycle Complex/core parcel, Dunbar House, the Wright Brothers National Museum/Wright Flyer III at Carillon Historical Park, and Huffman Prairie Flying Field), the logistics of easily getting visitors from one place to another has been an ongoing focus of park attention. The issue has only become more complicated over time, as the park eventually added three more locations—Hawthorn Hill, the Wright Company factory, and the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center (accessible via a different entrance to the air force base than the field itself).

The need to facilitate visitor circulation among parts of the park is covered in the 1997 General Management Plan, which mentions it as an important aspect of park development. In this document, however, the possibilities were confined to services provided by the Miami Valley Regional Transit Authority (i.e., public transportation), rather than specific services provided by the park.³¹

The 1992 enabling legislation established the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission (DAHC), in addition to the historical park, and made the commission responsible for planning transportation among park units, as well as between the park and other sites associated with the Aviation Trail. Toward this end, the heritage commission embarked on multiple transportation studies during the park's development phase.

In April 2000, the DAHC put together a proposal on the “Dayton Aviation Heritage Corridor and the Heritage Trolley.” This document outlined a series of recommendations for transportation among park sites and other key stops in Dayton. Among them:

Construct the first phase of a Heritage Trolley system that replicates the interurban line that transported the Wright brothers throughout the Dayton area during the time they invented the airplane. Phase One will run from the Paul Laurence Dunbar State Memorial to a Downtown Loop. The other phases consist of the following:

³¹ National Park Service, “Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan” (Denver: US Department of the Interior, 1997), 17, 32.

Carillon Park to the Downtown Loop
USAF Museum to Huffman Prairie
USAF Museum to Downtown Dayton Loop³²

The proposal listed four options for trolley operation: (1) the trolley is under full control of the Miami Valley Regional Transit Authority; (2) the Miami Valley Regional Transit Authority contracts with another agency to operate the trolley; (3) the NPS provides the service either directly or through a concessionaire; and (4) the trolley is operated by a nonprofit organization established for this purpose.³³

The same year as the heritage trolley proposal, in 2000, the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration conducted an alternative transportation study. This report outlined existing public transportation options and noted, “NHP officials believe a coordinated, connected transit service would greatly enhance the quality of the visitor’s experience at the park and, depending on the form of such service, could potentially become an element of the park.” This report also references a larger transportation study being conducted by the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission. Presumably, this was the 2001 comprehensive transportation study commissioned by DAHC in conjunction with the Miami River Valley Planning Commission, “Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Multimodal Transportation Study.”³⁴

As with the earlier reports, the multimodal transportation study recommended an alternative transportation system, such as a park shuttle, to transport visitors from one park site to another. This approach would provide a number of advantages, such as reducing the environmental impact of individual car travel; creating a more cohesive understanding of how the park’s components fit together as a whole; reducing the chances of visitors getting lost, confused, or frustrated while traveling between sites; and creating an additional, distinctive element of the visitor experience.³⁵

Press coverage of the idea highlighted another advantage, one harkening back to Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP’s origins: this type of transportation system would bring tourist dollars into the heart of Dayton. In the words of one *Dayton Daily News* article reporting on the idea of a trolley mimicking the route of Dayton’s old interurban railway:

³² “Dayton Aviation Heritage Corridor and the Heritage Trolley” (Dayton: Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission, April 2000), Unprocessed files, Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

³³ “Dayton Aviation Heritage Corridor and the Heritage Trolley.”

³⁴ “Alternative Transportation Report: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park” (Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, 2000), quotation from 6, folder 15, box 1, Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Burgess and Niple, Ltd., “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Multimodal Transportation Study.”

³⁵ Burgess and Niple Ltd., “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Multimodal Transportation Study,” 62.

“Imagine travelers being able to connect not only to the historic spots but also to experience the sense of traveling back in time. Imagine, too, the tourist dollars that could be brought downtown from the million or so visitors per year at the Air Force Museum.”³⁶

The 2001 transportation study considered the option of the shuttle being operated by the Miami Valley Regional Transit Authority (MVRTA), as well as the possibility of the NPS providing this service. It suggested that a shuttle service operate among park sites, the air force museum, and the Zion Center during the 2003 Centennial of Flight celebration year. The centennial year could serve as a pilot program, after which the park could complete a longer-term plan for transportation between areas of the park.³⁷

Even before the 2001 transportation study was complete, in August 2000 the MVRTA rejected the idea of funding a light-rail trolley system. Undaunted, advocates for a transportation system, including Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, organized the pilot of a “rubber-tired trolley version of the transportation system” for two days in October 2000.³⁸ During the 2003 centennial year, the area’s public transportation system (which had recently changed its name to the Greater Dayton Regional Transit Authority) implemented a temporary bus shuttle that ran every half hour, transporting visitors between park sites during the height of the local centennial celebration, June through October.³⁹ In August 2003, three years after rejecting the idea of a light-rail heritage trolley system, the Greater Dayton Regional Transit Authority announced that it was reviving the idea. In this incarnation, the trolley would link Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP’s core parcel, the Dunbar House, Downtown Dayton, and the Oregon District. An energy-efficient bus would service another route traveling between Sinclair Community College, Wright State University, the air force museum, and Huffman Prairie Flying Field, with a seasonal shuttle linking in Carillon Historical Park. However, this plan never came to fruition.⁴⁰

Despite what appeared to be near consensus on the need for a way to get visitors to the various park sites, the main hurdle seems to have been determining who would bear the financial cost and operating responsibility of such a system. The idea received another flurry of discussion in 2007, but this round ended with the Greater Dayton Regional Transit Authority definitively stating that it could not fund such a system without substantial financial involvement from other community entities. This seems to have been the end of the idea of transporting visitors between park sites.⁴¹

³⁶ Editorial, “Heritage Trolley Dream Still Alive—Appealingly, It Returns to the Past to Invent Dayton’s Future,” *Dayton Daily News*, May 17, 2000.

³⁷ Burgess and Niple Ltd., “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Multimodal Transportation Study,” 62–74, 88; National Park Service, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan,” 32.

³⁸ Dale Dempsey, “Trolleys to Tour Aviation Park Oct. 14–15,” *Dayton Daily News*, October 5, 2000.

³⁹ Dale Dempsey, “Diesel Bus Shuttle to Link Aviation Park Sites,” *Dayton Daily News*, March 27, 2003.

⁴⁰ Dale Dempsey, “Heritage Trolley Back on Track,” *Dayton Daily News*, August 28, 2003.

⁴¹ James Cummings, “Advocates Insist Trolleys Are Key to Area Tourism,” *Dayton Daily News*, October 17, 2007; “Trolley Idea Not the Only Good Idea,” *Dayton Daily News*, November 28, 2007.



A child enjoying himself during a Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park outreach program with the local YMCA, 2010. Image: NPS Media Gallery, Asset ID: 60C6891D-155D-4519-3E9F75AC134AD070.

Parking

In the early years of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, the only dedicated parking available within the park’s core parcel was a “rundown,” “gravelly” parking lot located to the north of the Wright Cycle Company building, where Wright-Dunbar Plaza now stands.⁴² The park’s 1997 general management plan (GMP) stated that the park boundaries would not be extended to accommodate additional parking spaces. Instead, visitors to the core parcel would have to park on Williams Street or in a city-owned lot behind the Innerwest Priority Board office. The GMP also noted that private entities might create parking that could be “shared by shoppers and park visitors” and that land east of Churchill Lane could be turned into parking.⁴³

⁴² Ann Honious, Oral History, interview by Susan Ferentinos, August 23, 2021, 5, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Oral History of Madeline Iseli, interview by Ed Roach, September 9, 2005, 8, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁴³ National Park Service, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan,” 33.

Availability of parking, however, is a key issue for visitors. The 1998 annual report of the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission noted that its transportation committee “identified local parking, signage and traffic control devices as an area of concern that it would deal with over the next few years. The primary area of concern would be the W Third St District as the other park sites (Carillon Park and Huffman Prairie) faced less significant parking and traffic issues.”⁴⁴

Visitors apparently agreed. A 2004 study of visitors to the park found that 65 percent thought parking was “extremely important.”⁴⁵ While the vast majority of visitors reported no difficulty finding parking, those that did found that difficulty when visiting the park’s core parcel.⁴⁶ Additionally, when asked what information they had sought and been unable to find while planning their trip to the park, visitors noted the lack of advance information about parking.⁴⁷

By the time the visitor study occurred, however, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was already taking steps to increase the ease of parking near the core parcel. In late 2003, the park began working with Wright Dunbar, Inc. and the Greater Dayton Regional Transit Authority to create new parking lots for the neighborhood. Wright Dunbar, Inc. took the lead on the project. The lots were intended to provide parking for Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP as well as the Wright-Dunbar Business District. Three lots were built, with one located behind the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center on Sanford Court, in the space mentioned in the GMP. The two other lots were located at the corner of Second and Williams Streets and the corner of Broadway and Fourth Streets.⁴⁸

In order to build the lots, the city had to change zoning requirements for businesses and historic attractions, as the zoning requirements necessitated more spaces than the physical area could provide. Possibly this is what longtime neighborhood resident Mary Ellington was referring to in 2017 when, after speaking favorably about the national park unit’s presence, she stated, “Of course, we had some issues with the parking lots, which had me very upset, and I felt like the city should have gone out of their way to do a little bit more over here than they’ve done.”⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Blake, “Superintendent’s Report, FY 2008,” 10.

⁴⁵ Manni and Hollenhorst, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Visitor Study 2004, v. 1,” 41.

⁴⁶ Manni and Hollenhorst, 18.

⁴⁷ Manni and Hollenhorst, 14.

⁴⁸ Jaclyn Giovis, “Parking Planned for Wright Dunbar—Project to Build Three Lots Will Cost \$1.2 Million,” *Dayton Daily News*, October 18, 2004; Ann Honious, “Letter to Mark J. Epstein,” April 14, 2004, and Justin M. Cook, “Letter to John E. Moore Jr.,” June 29, 2004, both in “Vertical File: Section 106 Parking Lots” (n.d.), Vertical Files, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Lawrence Blake, “Looking Ahead into 2004,” *Wright Dunbar Heritage News*, n.d.; Wright Dunbar, Inc., “Special Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes,” August 9, 2004, Lawrence Blake Papers, Wright State University Special Collections.

⁴⁹ Giovis, “Parking Planned for Wright Dunbar—Project to Build Three Lots Will Cost \$1.2 Million”; Mary Ellington, Oral History, interview by Casey Huegel, February 24, 2017, 22, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

Construction on the new parking lots began in August 2004. The project cost \$1.2 million, funded largely by the federal government, with additional funding coming from Wright Dunbar, Inc. and a grant from the Regional Transit Authority.⁵⁰ Nicholas Georgeff recalled that the lots were completed shortly before he started as the park’s management assistant in 2006. “It was kind of neat that I actually had an actual parking lot that I could park in as opposed to dirt and gravel. I was told more dirt than gravel on that.”⁵¹ In late 2014, Wright-Dunbar Inc. expressed interest in turning oversight of parking lots to Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, but that suggestion never came to pass. Instead, the organization transferred ownership of the parking lots to Aviation Trail, Inc. in 2016⁵²

Signage

Because Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP is a park with multiple units, signage has been an area of park management that has demanded a surprising amount of attention throughout the park’s history. Signs serve multiple purposes. They direct visitors—who are often unfamiliar with the area—to the national park unit, and in the case of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, they also direct visitors *between* park resources. In addition, signs play an important part in creating a park’s identity, through consistent naming and use of the NPS brand, comprised of the agency’s arrowhead logo, proprietary fonts, and trademark colors.

NPS officials recognized the importance of getting people to the park but were also firm that, outside of park boundaries, this was not the NPS’s responsibility. While signs on highways and major arteries directing visitors to park sites (known as wayfinding signs) clearly fell under city or state jurisdiction, signage was at times a source of frustration. Although the park’s priority was helping visitors get to its sites, transportation authorities apparently did not share a similar sense of urgency about the issue, as discussions about signage appear repeatedly in park records in the ten years leading up to the 2003 centennial.⁵³

In 1994, the city of Dayton received a \$44,800 transportation enhancement grant from the Ohio Department of Transportation to provide wayfinding signs to sites related to the city’s aviation heritage. These sites included park sites, as well as the National Museum of the US Air Force and the US Air and Trade Show. These signs either did not materialize or did not adequately distinguish those sites that were part of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, because the 1997 general management plan for the park again mentions appropriate

⁵⁰ Giovis, “Parking Planned for Wright Dunbar—Project to Build Three Lots Will Cost \$1.2 Million.”

⁵¹ Nicholas Georgeff, Oral History II, interview by Susan Ferentinos, May 10, 2022, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library.

⁵² Dean Alexander, “Notes from Wright-Dunbar Board Meeting, Dec. 18, 2014” (December 19, 2014), Folder: Wright-Dunbar, Dean Alexander Documents, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Staff Records; “Limited Warranty Deed, File #2016-00030385” (June 13, 2016).

⁵³ National Park Service, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan,” 17, 32, 75.

signage as something that had not yet been achieved. The report states that the city of Dayton was in the process “of developing a connection between the four park sites through a sign system,” using funding from the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, a different funding source than the 1994 grant.⁵⁴

As the 2003 centennial approached, the park and its supporters made a concerted effort to develop and employ a wayfinding system to guide tourists to relevant aviation sites. In 1998, the Dayton/Montgomery County Convention and Visitors Bureau created a project they called “Destination Dayton,” with this specific purpose. In the initial planning, over eighty sites were identified for possible inclusion in the program, but the ultimate plan limited inclusion to noncommercial sites that possessed adequate parking and met specified attendance levels. This winnowing process left twenty-one sites to be included in the program. The Destination Dayton effort recommended a three-tiered system of signs on interstate highways, immediately off highway exit ramps and along major arteries. The Miami Valley was divided into five regions, each with its own logo, to further assist with both wayfinding and branding.⁵⁵

At about the same time, the park was working on another level of signage, at the “site-identification” level. The park sought both to facilitate visitor travel between park sites and to create a sense of unity among the locations, marking them all as part of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. Simultaneously, all site-identification signs also needed to acknowledge the park’s partner, different at each of the four sites then part of the park. The park engaged national architectural firm Quinn Evans, which was already involved in the rehabilitation of multiple historic structures within the park, to design signage that met these various needs, in consultation with Cuyahoga Valley National Park Landscape Architect Kim Norley.⁵⁶

In addition to the Destination Dayton project and the park’s efforts to identify its components more clearly, the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission was advocating at the state level for signs on the interstate highways directing visitors to the park’s two new interpretive centers, both opening in the centennial year, and its partner sites. While the

⁵⁴ Jim Bland, “US Grants to Aid Projects: Bike Trail, Park among Proposals,” *Dayton Daily News*, July 13, 1994; National Park Service, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan,” 19.

⁵⁵ Corbin Design, “Destination Dayton: A Wayfinding and Signage Program for Dayton/Montgomery County, Ohio, Concepts and Design Standards” (Report, October 1999), 2–8, Unprocessed files, Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Cindy Schillaci to Lawrence Blake, Email, May 31, 2000, Unprocessed files, Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

⁵⁶ Marla McEneny, Comments on Draft 1 of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Administrative History, transmitted to Susan Ferentinos via email, July 31, 2020.

Ohio Department of Transportation was amenable to installing highway signs, the specific wording to be used on the signs and the specific locations on the highway required over a year of negotiation.⁵⁷

Accessibility

Since the 1960s, the NPS has had to follow federal legislation requiring access to parks for all visitors, regardless of mobility. The passage of the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 mandated that all federal buildings or buildings built with federal money be physically accessible to everyone. The passage of the Rehabilitation Act in 1973, particularly Section 504 and further amendments in 1978, required recipients of federal money to provide not only facilities but also programs accessible to all. Beyond federal law, the NPS instituted its own accessibility standards. In 1979, it established the Division of Special Programs and Populations, which would eventually become the Office of Accessibility. The division worked to make all parks more accessible, providing trainings and issuing guidelines. For example, Special Directive 83-3: Accessibility for Disabled Persons mandated that the same benefits be provided for disabled and nondisabled persons. In 1984, the division released guidelines describing how to make interpretation more accessible as well as offering recommendations for rangers to engage visitors with an array of abilities. That same year, the US Department of the Interior adopted the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards, which attempted to bring uniformity to the various accessibility standards.⁵⁸

In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law and significantly impacted public accommodations and infrastructure in the United States. Although, as part of the executive branch of the federal government, the US Department of the Interior (DOI) is technically not bound to adhere to the ADA, the law raised public awareness and expectations for accessible facilities. In 1992, a DOI directive mandated the use of ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) for new construction, except in situations where the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards required a higher degree of accessibility. The 2000

⁵⁷ Anthony Sculimbrene to Philip Stormer, February 25, 2002, Unprocessed files, Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park; Philip Stormer to Anthony Sculimbrene, May 9, 2002, Unprocessed files, Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park; Anthony Sculimbrene to William L. Harrison, Letter, August 7, 2002, Unprocessed files, Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park; Anthony Sculimbrene to William L. Harrison, Letter, June 25, 2002, Unprocessed files, Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

⁵⁸ Perri Meldon, "Interpreting Access: A History of Accessibility and Disability Representations in the National Park Service" (Master's thesis, Amherst, University of Massachusetts, 2019), 40–41, <http://npshistory.com/publications/interpretation/meldon-2019.pdf>; David C. Park, Wendy M. Ross, and W. Kay Ellis, "Interpretation for Disabled Visitors in the National Park System" (Washington, DC: National Park Service, Special Programs and Populations Branch, 1984), 10–11, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED260532.pdf>; Robert Stanton, "Director's Order #42: Accessibility for Visitors with Disabilities in National Park Service Programs and Services," National Park Service, November 3, 2000, <https://www.nps.gov/policy/dorders/dorder42.html>.

NPS Director's Order No. 42 emphasized that park sites should "seek to provide the highest level of accessibility that is reasonable," rather than merely meeting legal requirements, because "it is the right thing to do."⁵⁹

Since Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was created in 1992, shortly after the passage of the ADA and the adoption of the ADAAG, it was one of the first national park units to incorporate accessibility issues into the earliest stages of development. The park's 1997 general management plan called for including captions in all audiovisual programming, creating exhibits with favorable sight lines for those in wheelchairs, and providing ramps throughout the park.⁶⁰ The interpretive centers were likewise planned and built to meet the ADAAG and Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standards; they include accessible parking, restrooms, and exhibits, as well as benches and elevators.⁶¹ The park's other sites had to be made more accessible while maintaining the historical integrity of the buildings. When Wright Hall underwent renovations in 1997 to connect it to the replica Wright bicycle shop at Carillon Historical Park, funds were spent to make the facility more accessible through ramps, rather than stairs.⁶²

In the years after the 2003 centennial, the park worked steadily to make its sites more accessible to visitors. The NPS assisted the Ohio Historical Society with acquiring grants to install an exterior lift to the Dunbar House visitor center in 2005, providing access to both the visitor center and the historic house. In 2006, the park collaborated with Dayton History and an outside team to create an audio tour of the Wright Brothers Aviation Center, for visually impaired visitors. The exterior stone staircase was also rehabilitated for accessibility. The NPS added t-coils and assisted-listening devices to exhibits at both interpretive centers in 2011. Ramps were added to 22 South Williams Street in 2008 and the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center and the Wright Brothers Memorial in 2015.⁶³

Though the NPS has had accessibility requirements in place since the 1960s, parks are not yet universally accessible. As described by historian Perri Meldon, funding, lack of interest by some staff, and a lack of accountability have prevented full compliance with federal laws. As an indication of NPS priorities, Meldon notes that the Office of

⁵⁹ Stanton, "Director's Order #42: Accessibility for Visitors with Disabilities in National Park Service Programs and Services."

⁶⁰ Appendix B: Special Populations: Programmatic Accessibility Guidelines for Interpretive Media, National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan."

⁶¹ National Park Service, "Draft General Management Plan Amendment Environmental Impact Statement" (Dayton, OH: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, November 2005), 19, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Appendix B, National Park Service, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP General Management Plan and Interpretive Plan"; National Park Service, "Accessibility," Dayton Aviation Heritage, February 2, 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/daav/planyourvisit/accessibility.htm>.

⁶² Benjamin Kline, "Access Follows a Natural Path," *Dayton Daily News*, March 30, 1997.

⁶³ Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2004–2007," 14; Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2008," 3, 6–7; Alexander, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009–2011," 6; Alexander, "Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP State of the Park Report, FY 2015," 3.

Accessibility has been downgraded from a division to a program.⁶⁴ A 2014 NPS task force on accessibility determined parks remained inaccessible to many visitors, and recommended that the NPS invest in making both facilities and programs more accessible in the period from 2015 to 2020.⁶⁵

At Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, the Dunbar House has been traditionally difficult to access for visitors with mobility issues. In the 2004 Visitor Survey (before the addition of the exterior lift) at least one visitor rated house accessibility “poor” for disabled persons.⁶⁶ The 2019 Paul Laurence Dunbar House Cultural Landscape and Historic Structures Report noted that accessibility issues continued at the house, citing narrow, poorly maintained sidewalks, a failing lift, and the lack of “a functional universally accessible route” through the site. The report recommended the rehabilitation approach for the site, as opposed to preservation, restoration, or reconstruction, so that the site could be made more accessible. Specifically, the report recommended moving the lift indoors and creating a fully accessible path through the site. Though interpretive solutions were beyond the scope of the report, it noted that visitor experiences were not universal. Since only the first floor is accessible to disabled visitors, they have a different experience than those visitors who can access the second floor.⁶⁷

Concessions

When Aviation Trail, Inc. (ATI) opened the Wright Cycle Company building to visitors in 1988, it also began operating a small gift shop at the site, selling books and educational materials. They continued to operate the gift shop in this location after the NPS took ownership of the building in 1996, and the park provided staff to work in the shop. Sales of items increased after the park took over the building, due to longer hours, a larger inventory, marketing, and the help of park staff. In 1998, there was some debate about whether ATI would operate a separate gift shop in the planned Aviation Trail Visitor Center, ran by their own staff and volunteers. Ultimately, ATI agreed to the NPS running the gift shop in

⁶⁴ Meldon, “Interpreting Access: A History of Accessibility and Disability Representations in the National Park Service,” 45–46, 59.

⁶⁵ Accessibility Task Force, “All In! Accessibility in the National Park Service, 2015-2020” (National Park Service, August 29, 2014), https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/upload/All_In_Accessibility_in_the_NPS_2015-2020_FINAL.pdf.

⁶⁶ The sample size was very small and the study authors recommended using caution when interpreting the data. Manni and Hollenhorst, “Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Visitor Study 2004, v. 1,” 57.

⁶⁷ STRATA Architecture Inc., “Paul Laurence Dunbar House Cultural Landscape and Historic Structures Report [CLR/HSR], Volume 1” (Dayton: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, 2019), 3.31–3.33, <http://www.npshistory.com/publications/daav/clr-hsr-dunbar-house-v1.pdf>; STRATA Architecture Inc., “Paul Laurence Dunbar House Cultural Landscape and Historic Structures Report [CLR/HSR], Volume 2” (Dayton: Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, 2019), 5.8, 6.7–6.10, 7.4, 7.12, <http://www.npshistory.com/publications/daav/clr-hsr-dunbar-house-v1.pdf>.

the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center (WDIC). The following year, 1999, the NPS signed an overarching cooperating association agreement with the nonprofit organization Eastern National to oversee gift shops in dozens of park units, including Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. This agreement extended for five years, which may have been why Dayton was included, even though the park's visitor centers were not yet constructed in 1999.⁶⁸ Indeed, discussions between the park and Eastern National had begun as early as 1996, with the initial planning of the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center (HPFFIC).⁶⁹

The 1999 NPS agreement with Eastern National did cover the gift shop at the HPFFIC, as well as the one at the WDIC. Both shops opened when their respective visitor centers opened, December 2002 for the HPFFIC and June 2003 for the WDIC.⁷⁰ In the first year of operation, the two gift shops together had approximately \$118,000 in sales, and Eastern National worked with the park to develop four publications to sell in the shops. Since then, Eastern National has worked with the park to create holiday ornaments, publish a junior ranger booklet, and arrange conferences. In recognition of the park's successful cooperation with Eastern National, the nonprofit awarded the park its Charles S. Marshall Unit Award in 2004.⁷¹

Although the park superintendent has final say in the merchandise for sale in the park gift shops, park partners have some influence. Longtime ATI member and amateur historian, Fred Fisk, successfully lobbied for his book, *The Wright Brothers from Bicycle to Biplane*, to be sold in the park gift shop, despite a scathing review by Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP Historian Edward Roach. According to Roach, the book was "an inappropriate item for Eastern National to sell at its outlets."⁷² In 2008, the chair of ATI, Marvin

⁶⁸ "William Gibson to George Wedekind," October 5, 1998, folder 6, box 3, George "JR" Wedekind Jr. Aviation Collection, Wright State University Special Collections; William Gibson, "Superintendent's Report, FY 1996" (Dayton: National Park Service, 1996), 2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; "Briefing Statement" (March 18, 1999), folder 32, box 1, Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; "Chesley Moroz to Larry Blake," October 4, 1999, Lawrence Blake Papers, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library. In a 2001 agreement between ATI and NPS, US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "General Agreement Number 1443GA629599001, with Aviation Trail, Inc." (March 8, 1999), folder 36, box 19, Aviation Trail, Inc. Records, Wright State University Special Collections.

⁶⁹ Gibson, "Superintendent's Report, FY 1996," 2.

⁷⁰ Lawrence Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2003" (National Park Service, 2003), 2, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library. Note, the Superintendent's report for FY 2003 incorrectly lists the opening date of the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center as December 17, 2003. It should be December 17, 2002.

⁷¹ Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2004–2007," 5.

⁷² Edward Roach, "Fisk Review" (n.d.), folder: ATI, Dean Alexander Documents, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Staff Records.

Christian, warned Fisk that he would be asked to resign from ATI's board if he continued to harass park visitors into buying his book.⁷³ In 2011, Fisk again pushed his book onto park visitors and had to be removed from the situation by park staff.⁷⁴

As part of their duties at the interpretive centers' front desks, park interpretive rangers staff the park gift shops. Bob Petersen served as the park's Eastern National coordinator in the early years of the relationship. In 2011, Eastern National hired a part-time employee to manage the park's gift shops, replacing Petersen as coordinator. The park superintendent continues to approve the inventory sold in the shops.⁷⁵ In 2013, Eastern National selected Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP to represent the Midwest Region in its Passport to Your National Parks commemorative stamp set for the following year. The stamp included a photograph of the Wright Cycle Company.⁷⁶

Conclusion

Visitor services at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP have generally coalesced around two major areas: outreach to various potential audiences and facilitating visitor travel among park sites, while accessibility has been a more secondary concern. Outreach to aviation lovers was initially prioritized, in light of the 2003 aviation centennial, but since that time, outreach to Dayton residents, especially those in West Dayton, has steadily increased. The issue of a coordinated transportation system among park sites received a great deal of support early in the park's history, but eventually stalled around questions of cost. The alternative transportation system has not been given extensive consideration since 2007, although the growing urgency around climate change may well resuscitate the issue of group transportation in the near future. Site identification and wayfinding, after demanding an outsized amount of NPS attention, have finally reached an acceptable level. However, as recently as 2018, the park's long-range interpretive plan included wayfinding as a continued area of concern, specifically for Huffman Prairie Flying Field.

⁷³ Marvin Christian, "Letter to Fred Fisk," August 8, 2008, folder: ATI, Dean Alexander Documents, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Staff Records.

⁷⁴ Julia Frasure, "Incident in the WDIC on 10/12/11" (October 14, 2011), folder: ATI, Dean Alexander Documents, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Staff Records.

⁷⁵ Eastern National, "Dayton Aviation National Historical Park Receives Charles S. Marshall Unit Award," February 24, 2004, "Vertical File: Eastern National" (n.d.), Vertical Files, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Library; Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2004-2007," 5; Blake, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2008," 2; Alexander, "Superintendent's Report, FY 2009-2011," 3; Eastern National, "Annual Review of Inventory, 2014" (2014), folder: Eastern National, Dean Alexander Documents, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Staff Records.

⁷⁶ Kevin C. Kissling, "Letter to Dean Alexander," December 13, 2013, "VF: Eastern National."

Conclusion

In the thirty years since Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park (NHP) was authorized, the United States has experienced the 9/11 terror attacks and a global coronavirus pandemic, adopted the internet as an essential tool of daily life, and witnessed the at first slow and now distressingly rapid effects of climate change. The country has also celebrated the Centennial of Flight. Some of these circumstances, like the terror attacks and the pandemic, required the park to disrupt its day-to-day operations to respond to the immediate crisis. Some, like the centennial, were a decade in the making. And some, like the internet and climate change, could have been incorporated into park programming and operations much more quickly, had it not been for the realities of being a small park within a much larger agency where change takes time.

Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP seems poised to enter a new phase of management and visitor engagement. It is just beginning to implement the recommendations of the 2018 long-range interpretive plan (LRIP), having been delayed in its implementation by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is in the middle of a general management plan amendment as well. As the park moves into this new era, my hope is that this administrative history can provide some insight into the park's accomplishments thus far, and the work still to be done. These last pages of the report offer a recap of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP thus far, with an eye toward how its history can inform park planning moving forward.

Partnerships

Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was by no means the first partnership park in the National Park Service (NPS) system. Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Boston National Historical Park are two much larger examples that precede the park in Dayton by more than twenty years.¹ Nevertheless, in the early 1990s, when Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was authorized, partnership parks were still a relatively rare structure for a national park unit. In the thirty years since, partnerships have become far more common. Between 1993 and 2011, almost half of newly authorized national park units had a partnership structure.²

¹ Hal K. Rothman, "The Park That Makes Its Own Weather: An Administrative History of Golden Gate National Recreation Area," *Administrative History* (San Francisco: Golden Gate National Recreation Area, 2002); Seth C. Bruggeman, *Lost on the Freedom Trail: The National Park Service and Urban Renewal in Postwar Boston* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2022).

² Laura B. Comay, "National Park Service: Partnership Parks and Programs" (Washington, DC: Library of Congress Congressional Research Service, December 2011), 1.

While Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP was not the first partnership park, it nevertheless has much to teach other sites with this structure that came after it. The first lesson, perhaps an obvious one, is that these types of parks are only as successful as their partnerships. Dayton has been fortunate in this area; its partnerships have gone relatively smoothly, particularly in later years, once everyone adjusted to the various organizational cultures involved. At times, the park's relationship with Aviation Trail, Inc. (ATI) has been somewhat strained, but this is perhaps unavoidable given how closely the two organizations work together. They share very similar missions to preserve the aviation heritage of the region and share an interpretive center within two joined buildings, one owned by the NPS and one owned by ATI.

Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's partners have brought great benefits to the park. ATI, Dayton History, and the National Aviation Heritage Alliance especially—along with the now-defunct 2003 Fund Committee and the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission—share the park's goal of placing the specific story of Dayton into a wider national and global context. They bring a unique enthusiasm for the city and a knowledge of local relationships and politics that have greatly assisted the park in accomplishing its goals, particularly in the early years of each superintendent's term. These organizations lend a stability that can be lacking in national park units, where many staff members, especially those in management positions, move locations frequently over the course of their careers.

The Dunbar House

The lesson about healthy partnerships goes the other way as well, however. The relationship with the Ohio History Connection, which partners with the park at the Paul Laurence Dunbar House, has been the least robust of the park's partnerships, and it is perhaps for this reason that this unit of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP has struggled to find its place within a park otherwise dedicated to aviation. The 2018 LRIP devoted a significant amount of space to grappling with the question of how best to bring Dunbar's story to wider public attention. And while it appears to never have been officially considered, in casual conversations with me numerous NPS employees wondered if Dunbar's legacy would not be better served by making the house a freestanding unit of the National Park System.

I would argue that the work still to be done in highlighting the Dunbar House dovetails nicely with other work the park plans to do in the upcoming years, namely increasing overall park relevance by strengthening relationships with the neighborhoods surrounding the core parcel and the Dunbar House and allocating more park resources to social history and current events.

The Ongoing Goal of Relevance

Although it became a much more explicit goal of the NPS in the early years of the twenty-first century, relevance has always been a goal of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP. As described in Chapter 3, “The Beginnings of Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park,” the park was conceived as part of a local effort to connect the city of Dayton with its industrial glory days. And the Paul Laurence Dunbar House was included in the park, at least in part, to convince the West Dayton community (predominately African American at this time) to support the park’s creation.

The technological aspects of flight have always been a significant part of the park’s interpretation, and one could argue that this has only made the park more relevant over time, as the country has set its sights on the need to retain a technological advantage on the world stage. STEM education is an emphasis of most curriculum standards and has seeped into the interpretive programming of history museums throughout the United States. The values of ingenuity and entrepreneurship are also increasingly relevant, as it has become apparent that resiliency and creative thinking are tools that will be highly sought in the US workforce of the future. The technology of flight is a strength of the park’s interpretation, and moving forward, this feature can be enhanced by incorporating more information on the science of climate change and air travel’s role in this larger phenomenon. Doing so would also bring the park further toward its agency goal of relevance.

Emphasizing social history, in addition to the history of technology, might also bring in a new kind of visitor and increase the park’s relevance to this audience as well. In this regard, the park might take inspiration from the approach of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, as the NPS has done in numerous other instances. This organization describes a site of conscience with these words:

The need to remember often competes with the equally strong pressure to forget. Even with the best of intentions—such as to promote reconciliation after deeply divided events by “turning the page”—erasing the past can prevent new generations from learning critical lessons and destroy opportunities to build a peaceful future. The need to remember often competes with the equally strong pressure to forget. A Site of Conscience is a place of memory—such as a historic site, place-based museum or memorial—that prevents this erasure from happening in order to ensure a more just and humane future. Not only do Sites of Conscience provide safe spaces to remember and preserve even the most traumatic memories, but they enable their visitors to make connections between the past and related contemporary human rights issues.³

³ “About Us,” International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, accessed June 4, 2022, <http://www.sitesofconscience.org/en/who-we-are/about-us>.

Put simply, linking the story of the Wright brothers, Dunbar, and Dayton’s history as an industrial center to contemporary issues facing park visitors—the ongoing struggle for racial justice, climate change, the growing wealth disparity among different regions of the country, for example—could demonstrate the past’s relevance for a new generation of visitors, including those in the immediate vicinity of the core parcel.

Beginning with Lawrence Blake’s term as superintendent, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP has made outreach to the residents of Dayton a priority, as described in Chapter 10, “Serving the Visitors.” This is a trend that will only continue to improve relationships between the park and the local community. However, this work could be facilitated by clearer directives from the NPS, which at times seems to be sending mixed messages in its encouragement of parks to increase relevance while also restricting allocations for work not deemed “mission critical.”

Circulation among Park Sites

As discussed in the last chapter, the issue of helping visitors get from one part of the park to another has occupied a surprising amount of park attention over the last thirty years. With regard to providing transportation, the current consensus seems to have settled on it being a good idea for the visitors and the local tourist industry, but one that is not financially feasible given current visitation levels. The near ubiquity of global positioning systems on cellular phones that has occurred in the last decade has hopefully lessened instances of visitors getting lost while traveling on their own between park sites; however, the amount of attention devoted to wayfinding in the Huffman Prairie Flying Field section of the 2018 LRIP suggests that the problem continues on some level.

Visitor Changes

Park planning efforts would be greatly facilitated by an understanding of who is visiting Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP and what their experiences are while there. The last visitor survey at the park was released in 2004, one year after the centennial. It is quite likely that park visitors have changed over that period, given both the new forms of outreach the park has employed and the changing demographics of the city and the country as a whole. In the living memory of most people living in the United States today, air travel is something to be taken for granted, humans have always traveled to outer space, and manufacturing has never been a major part of the US economy. For many, the invention and building of aircraft have ceased to be a wonder, and as a result the park has likely lost a significant

Conclusion

component of its built-in audience. But the confirmation of this theory and the specifics of *how* the park's audience has changed depend on current data about who is visiting the park and why.

* * *

Specific suggestions for documenting and understanding the history of this park appear in Appendix A of this report. Overall, the park's current planning momentum promises exciting changes to come at Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park in its next phase of development.

Acknowledgments

I begin these acknowledgments by thanking the late Aidan Smith, public history director of the Organization of American Historians (OAH), who died quite unexpectedly in April 2018. Aidan oversaw the cooperative program between the OAH and the National Park Service (NPS) under which this administrative history was completed. I had been involved with NPS administrative histories for years; I had, in fact, held the public history director job at the OAH prior to Aidan. But I had never yet had the chance to write one. I am indebted to Aidan for giving me the opportunity to work on this project. I have enjoyed learning more about the history of the park service, the city of Dayton, Ohio, and the fields of heritage tourism and economic development.

The NPS and I were extremely lucky to meet Paul Zwirecki while still adjusting to the loss of Aidan. Paul joined the OAH as its new public history director in fall 2018. His calm and thoughtful approach to getting all the OAH-NPS projects back on track was a great comfort to me and allowed me to turn my attention back to Dayton, after a few frantic months of helping the OAH cope with the aftermath of Aidan's passing. On the other side of the collaborative relationship, Nicholas Georgeff at Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP smoothed my way by representing our project to the larger agency, filing the necessary paperwork, and seeking various permissions to proceed.

Once my research began in earnest, my intellectual debts began to multiply. An early conversation with urban historian Eric Sandweiss helped shape my approach to the history of Dayton's west side neighborhood. Reading older administrative histories by Ron Cockrell, Rebecca Conard, Hal K. Rothman, and my late mentor Jannelle Warren-Findley helped me understand the ins and outs of this type of effort. Reading Joan Zenzen's published writings inspired me to think more holistically about the ways administrative histories fit into the larger operations of the NPS.

Cathy Stanton's book *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City* and her later writing on industrial heritage offered crucial insight for understanding what had happened in Dayton. And Seth C. Bruggeman's *Lost on the Freedom Trail: The National Park Service and Urban Renewal in Postwar Boston* came across my desk at a particularly fortuitous moment in my own writing on the NPS and urban renewal in turn-of-the-twenty-first-century Dayton. A subsequent morning spent discussing the administrative history genre with Seth Bruggeman and Hilary Iris Lowe further clarified my thinking.

Beyond the administrative histories he's authored, Ron Cockrell has also played a significant hand in shaping this report. When the COVID-19 pandemic restricted my ability to travel to Omaha and conduct research at the NPS Midwest Regional Office, Ron ensured that the relevant materials were digitized and sent my way. In addition, his decades of experience working in the history division of the NPS Midwest Regional Office, and his

Acknowledgments

thorough reading of multiple drafts of this project, contributed perspective and recommendations that ultimately made this a better product. Indeed, I was touched by the sheer array of people who took the time to read drafts of this report and offer their feedback. For this generosity, I thank Dean Alexander, Lawrence Blake, Geoff Burt, Rachel Franklin-Weekley, William Harlow, Alex Heckman, Ann Honious, Casey Huegel, Marla McEneny, Bob Petersen, Ryan Qualls, Edward Roach, Adam Weiwel, Mackensie Witmer-Blake, and the anonymous peer reviewer.

While we are on the subject of being generous with one's time, I would also like to thank those who agreed to participate in oral history interviews with me. Nicholas Georgeff, Brady Kress, Ann Honious, Edward Roach, and Paul Woodruff together brought the park's history to life with their anecdotes and insights. Bonnie Murray was unable to participate in an oral history interview, but instead answered a series of questions from me over email. I also benefited from oral histories previously collected by Casey Huegel, Ann Honious, and Edward Roach, and I thank them for doing this work long before the park was due for an administrative history.

My visits to Dayton were always something to look forward to. Nicholas, Ed, Ryan, and Casey stood at the ready to answer my questions about the local political landscape, the policies of the NPS, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and the Wright brothers. Ryan took my wife (and research assistant) Danielle McClelland and me on a personal tour of the Dunbar House, and Casey was a magician at navigating the park archives. I have him to thank for most of the images that appear in this report. In the final weeks of this project, all four of these folks promptly answered an endless stream of requests and questions from me. Ed, in particular, took extended time away from his other duties to review late-breaking revisions and explain a few facets of park history that still remained elusive.

Back at the home office, I was fortunate to have a range of assistance. As with every project I undertake, Danielle McClelland and Margaret Puskar-Pasewicz were always there to support me. Danielle spent many a family meal letting me bounce ideas off her and occasionally consented to dedicating our weekly movie nights to documentary films about deindustrialization. Margaret, a friend, fellow historian, and academic writing coach, kept me on track with her near-daily emails and monthly calls aimed at helping me navigate my many public history projects with efficiency and aplomb. Derek Duquette, Torin MacLaughlin, and Roy Woodall helped me with oral history transcriptions, while Madeline Stull did a masterful job getting my Zotero records into a consistent style.

My greatest debt of gratitude goes to Hannah Craddock Mossman, and it is for her excellent work on this project that I include her in the byline. Hannah gamely tackled the park's legislative history and put in most of the work untangling the early chronology of Aviation Trail, Inc. and the 2003 Fund Committee. She wrote the majority of Chapters 3, 4, and 6, as well as selected sections of other chapters, and remained cheerful and productive

Acknowledgments

no matter what messy research task I laid before her. She possesses keen skills in historical analysis, and I am so happy to have had the chance to work with her. Hopefully, this will not be our last collaboration.

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Appendix A

Suggestions for Preserving the History of Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park

Complete a New Visitor Study. A new visitor study is long overdue at Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park (NHP). The last was completed in 2004, and most likely visitor profiles have changed since then, as most of the outreach in 2004 was aimed at people interested in the Centennial of Flight and significant outreach has been done with the surrounding community in the interim. Similarly, the park has an additional resource (Hawthorn Hill), ATP's parachute museum is now open in the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center, and management of the Dunbar House has changed hands. All these conditions suggest that the park is due for a new visitor study to assess how these various changes have affected visitation.

Continue Adding to the Park's Oral History Collection. A strength of the Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's archives is its oral history collection. Interviews with key staff and stakeholders have been conducted at regular intervals throughout the park's history, and a new batch has recently been collected as part of this administrative history. The park's cultural resources department should continue adding to this collection regularly, perhaps as management staff (not just superintendents) or longtime employees leave the park.

Expand the Park's Archival Holdings for the Period after the Centennial of Flight. Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's records are disproportionately weighted to the park establishment period and the early years of management. The William Gibson and Lawrence Blake superintendencies are fairly well represented (although a significant portion of Blake's papers remain unprocessed). However, there are no paper files for Dean Alexander's or Kendell Thompson's superintendencies, and digital files from this era are extremely limited. In addition, there are no other records of park staff representing the years after the centennial in 2003, and the park's vertical files do not seem to have been actively maintained for at least the last decade. The park should make an effort to address this situation by soliciting records from long-term staff who leave the park and instituting a records management program, where current staff move files to the archive after a set number of years.

Develop a Procedure for Archiving Electronic Records. The park desperately needs a procedure for archiving electronic records, or its history will be lost. Granted, this is a problem throughout the National Park Service, but one that has been with the agency for more than twenty years. It is long overdue for the NPS to address this pressing problem, and in the absence of clear guidance from above, the park must step in to develop a stop-gap plan for preserving its history.

Create a Historical Record of the Park's Response to COVID-19. Currently, the only accessible park record of the park's response to the COVID-19 pandemic is a single blog post from March 2020, and to the best of my knowledge, there is currently no procedure for the park to archive its blog. Yet the pandemic was a worldwide event that future historians will be eager to explore. I recommend that the park historian create a timeline of events related to the park's handling of operations during the pandemic and document the safety measures that were put in place. Ideally, this account would also reference local, state, and federal pandemic mandates and how they affected the park. Documentation of how many park employees, if any, had the virus would also be useful (though without specific identifying information, of course).

Update the National Park Service Administrative History Guidelines. Although not within the purview of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP, the National Park Service Administrative History Guidelines (<https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/hisnps/NPSHistory/guide.pdf>) were last officially updated fifteen years ago. This document makes no reference to electronic records (or how to deal with the paucity of such records); individual park websites (what information might be found there, how to cite them as sources); or e-Tic (which was vital to the research of this report). Presumably, all the staff contact information is out of date as well. For the NPS to continue to produce useful and high-quality administrative histories, these guidelines must be updated regularly to respond to the changing realities of historical research.

Appendix B

Timeline

1885	The Ohio State Archeological and Historical Society, now the Ohio History Connection, is established
1927	Wright Brothers National Memorial is established in Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina
1936	Henry Ford purchases the Wright family home at 7 Hawthorn Street and the Wright Cycle Shop at 1127 West Third Street in Dayton and moves them to his outdoor history museum, Greenfield Village, in Dearborn, Michigan
1936	The state of Ohio purchases the Paul Laurence Dunbar House
1938	The Paul Laurence Dunbar House opens as an Ohio State Memorial under the oversight of the organization that is now the Ohio History Connection
1940	The local Wright Brothers Memorial on Wright Brothers Hill is dedicated
1948	Huffman Prairie Flying Field becomes part of the newly established Wright-Patterson Air Force Base
1948	Orville Wright dies, and his heirs sell his home, Hawthorn Hill, to National Cash Register
1948	The 1903 Wright Flyer is displayed at the Smithsonian Institution, where it remains on permanent exhibit at the National Air and Space Museum
1950	Carillon Historical Park opens to the public; its attractions include the 1905 Wright Flyer III
1962	The Paul Laurence Dunbar House is designated a National Historic Landmark
1981	Aviation Trail, Inc. incorporates
1981	The National Park Service HABS/HAER program documents the Paul Laurence Dunbar House
1982	Aviation Trail, Inc. buys the Hoover Block and the Setzer Building
1983	Aviation Trail, Inc. buys the Wright Cycle Company building
1988	Aviation Trail, Inc. opens the renovated Wright Cycle Company to the public, with an exhibit on the first floor
May 1989	Ron Cockrell is the first NPS employee to investigate the possibility of a national park unit in Dayton dedicated to the city's aviation heritage. Based on his report, additional staff from the NPS Midwest Regional Office visit Dayton later that month.
October 1989	The 2003 Fund Committee incorporates
1990	Hawthorn Hill, Huffman Prairie Flying Field, the Wright Cycle Company, and the Wright Flyer III become National Historic Landmarks, thanks to nominations written by staff at the NPS Midwest Regional Office
October 16, 1992	Public law 102-419 establishes Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park and initiates the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission

Appendix B

1993	William Gibson becomes the first superintendent of Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Park
1994	Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP takes over staffing of the Wright Cycle Company from Aviation Trail, Inc.
1996	The 2003 Fund Committee purchases the Hoover Block and the Wright Cycle Company from Aviation Trail, Inc. and deeds these properties to Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park
1997	The park completes its general management plan and interpretive plan
1998	Superintendent William Gibson retires
November 13, 1998	Public Law 105-389 establishes the federal Centennial of Flight Commission to oversee plans for a national celebration of the Wright brothers' first flight
1999	The Ohio Historical Society receives a "Save America's Treasures" grant to preserve the Paul Laurence Dunbar House
1999	Carillon Historical Park also receives a "Save America's Treasures" grant to conserve the Wright Flyer III
1999	Lawrence Blake becomes the superintendent of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP
October 24, 2000	Public law 106-356 expands Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park's boundary to include the newly renovated John S. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers Aviation Center (formerly Wright Hall) at Carillon Historical Park and the Setzer Building in West Dayton, owned by Aviation Trail, Inc.
September 11, 2001	The 9/11 terrorist attacks close Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, and by extension Huffman Prairie Flying Field and the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center (then under construction), to the public
2002	After extensive upgrades, Carillon Historical Park rededicates its Wright brothers' exhibit space as the John W. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers National Museum
December 17, 2002	The yearlong Centennial of Flight celebrations begin; Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center holds its dedication ceremony
2003	Centennial of Flight
2003	The Aviation Heritage Foundation (now doing business as the National Aviation Heritage Alliance) incorporates
June 2003	The Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center officially opens to the public
July 2003	The majority of Dayton festivities commemorating the Centennial of Flight take place over a seventeen-day period
2003	The city of Dayton gifts 26 and 30 South Williams Street to the National Park Service
2004	The National Park Service releases the National Historic Landmark Theme Study on Aviation History
December 2004	Congress creates the National Aviation Heritage Area
2005	Carillon Historical Park and Montgomery County Historical Society merge to form Dayton History
2005	The park releases a general management plan amendment and environmental impact statement

Appendix B

October 5, 2005	Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park celebrates the Centennial of Practical Flight at Huffman Prairie Flying Field
2006	National Cash Register leaves Dayton and donates Hawthorn Hill to the Wright Brothers Family Foundation
2008	Superintendent Lawrence Blake retires from the National Park Service
2008	Dayton aviation sites are added to the US Tentative List of World Heritage Sites
2009	Hawthorn Hill and the Wright Company factory site are added to the park boundary by an act of Congress
March 2009	Dean Alexander becomes Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP's third superintendent
March 2009	The Paul Laurence Dunbar House closes indefinitely until a new management arrangement can be made
March 30, 2009	Public Law 111-11, Section 7117, expands DAAV's park boundary to include Hawthorn Hill and the Wright Company Factory
June 2009	Dayton History takes over daily operation of the Paul Laurence Dunbar House, although the Ohio Historical Society (now the Ohio History Connection) retains oversight
2013	The Wright Brothers Family Foundation donates Hawthorn Hill to Dayton History
2013	Sequestration forces Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park to reduce its hours of operation
2015	Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP takes over staffing of the Dunbar House while Dayton History remains involved in the site's routine maintenance
2017	Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP completes its "Foundation Document"
2017	Superintendent Dean Alexander retires from the National Park Service; Kendell Thompson steps in as acting superintendent
2018	Kendell Thompson becomes the fourth superintendent of Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP
2019	The park begins work on a general management plan amendment (still in process)
March 2020	As part of a national lockdown to help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus, the park ceases visitor services indefinitely
2021	The agreement between the Ohio History Connection and Dayton History regarding the Dunbar House expires, and Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP takes over all day-to-day operations of the site
June 2021	With the reopening of the Dunbar House, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP is fully open to visitors for the first time since the March 2020 COVID-19 lockdown

Appendix C

Budget Allocations and Full-Time Staff Equivalences

Fiscal Year	Staff Levels FTE	Authorized (in USD; Before Assessments; Does Not Include Project Funds)
1997	2.86	\$291,700
1998	2.5	\$346,500
1999	2.92	\$522,688
2000	4.08	\$541,000
2001	4.54	\$587,200
2002	6.4	\$876,620
2003	16.36	\$1,537,510
2004	20.67	\$1,505,711
2005	19.28	\$1,573,000
2006	20.55	\$1,595,040
2007	19.24	\$1,608,267
2008	19.85	\$1,673,100
2009	20.98	\$1,697,770
2010	19.43	\$1,993,959
2011	21.37	\$1,975,671
2012	19.11	\$1,941,330
2013	20.96	\$1,829,520
2014	20.33	\$1,889,975
2015	19.32	\$1,947,071
2016	21.59	\$1,981,014
2017	20.49	\$1,967,212
2018	18.92	\$1,990,323
2019	19.14	\$2,011,031
2020	17.27	\$2,069,000
2021	17.79	\$2,127,000

Data provided by Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Budget Analyst LuAnn Hart, 2021.

Appendix D

Staff

Superintendents		
Kendell Thompson	Superintendent	2017-Present
Dean Alexander	Superintendent, both Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP and Hopewell Culture NHP	2012-2017
	Superintendent, Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP only	2009-2012
Lawrence “Larry” Blake	Superintendent	1999-2008
William “Bill” Gibson	Superintendent	1993-1998

Administration		
Nicholas Georgeff	Management Assistant	2006-Present
Timothy Good	Management Assistant	2003-2005
Bonnie Murray	Administrative Officer (Murray split her time between Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP and Hopewell Culture NHP)	1993-2013
Samartra “Marty” Anderson	Secretary	2000-2012
LuAnn Hart	Budget Analyst	2015-2021
Julia Frasure	Budget Analyst	2014-2015
Tamara L. Moore	Administrative Assistant	2017-Present
Tara Miller-Hunt	Administrative Assistant	2012-2016

Resource Management		
Noemi “Ami” Ghazala	Chief of Education and Resources Management	2010-2012
Ann Deines Honious	Chief of Education and Resources Management	2000-2009
	Historian	1996-2000
	Term Historian	1994-1996
Edward Roach	History Program Manager	2012-Present
	Historian	2003-2012
Casey Huegel	Museum Technician	2015-Present
Kim Novak	Seasonal Social Science Technician	2001-2002

Appendix D

Resource Management (continued)		
C. Suzanne Thomas	Seasonal Social Science Technician	2001
Judith Weiner	Seasonal Social Science Technician	2001
Alex Heckman	Seasonal Social Science Technician	2000
Rachel Houck	Seasonal Social Science Technician	2000
Elizabeth Fraterrigo	Seasonal Social Science Technician	1998-2000
Tim Froehlich	Seasonal Social Science Technician	1998-2000
Stephanie Siefring Weaver	Seasonal Social Science Technician	1998-2000
Karen Huber	Seasonal Social Science Technician	1998-1999
James C. Johnson	Seasonal Social Science Technician	1998
Laura Milsk	Seasonal Social Science Technician	1998

Interpretation and Education		
Jewel Harris Haskins	Director of Interpretation, Communication, and Education	2012-2021
Judith Hart	Education Specialist	2003-2015
Karen Rosga	Education Technician	2008-2016
Ryan Qualls	Supervisory Ranger	2014-Present
	Park Ranger	2011-2014
	Park Guide	2009-2011
Bob Petersen	Park Ranger	1995-2022
Gregg Smith	Park Ranger	2011-2020
	Visitor Use Assistant	2008-2011
	Park Guide	2003-2008
Julia Frasure	Park Ranger	2008-2014
	Park Guide	2003-2008
Arthur Currence	Park Ranger	2003-2008
Kathleen Walters	Park Guide	2016-Present
Beverly Breiser	Park Guide	2020-2022
Casey Huegel	Park Guide	2012-2015
Mandy Murray Way	Park Guide	2003-2011
	Seasonal Park Guide	2002-2003
Mark Dues	Park Guide	2008-2011
Darrin Palean	Park Guide	2003-2005

Appendix D

Seasonal Rangers/Park Guides (Partial)		
Jerry Kessens	Seasonal Ranger	1994-2003
Steve Lauer	Seasonal Ranger	1996-1997
Rae Boyd	Seasonal Ranger	1996
Steven Roberts	Seasonal Ranger	1996
Mike Nelson	Seasonal Ranger	1994-1996
Samuel Bowlin	Seasonal Park Guide	2013-2016
Mary Dagg	Seasonal Park Guide	2008-2011
Leisa Ling	Seasonal Park Guide	2010-2011
Kimberly Juhnke	Seasonal Park Guide	2010-2011
Daniel Hughes	Seasonal Park Guide	2010-2011
Maribeth Kambitsch	Seasonal Park Guide	2009-2011
Frank Coleman	Seasonal Park Guide	2009-2010
Jennifer Edwards	Seasonal Park Guide	2008-2009
Erica Wainwright	Seasonal Park Guide	2008-2009
Jacqueline Winfree	Seasonal Park Guide	2008-2009
Nicholas Roll	Seasonal Park Guide	2008
Casey Simmons	Seasonal Park Guide	2008
William Yandle	Seasonal Park Guide	2002-2008
Denneil Bruce	Seasonal Park Guide	2003
Shero Bryant	Seasonal Park Guide	2003
Laura Diewald	Seasonal Park Guide	2003
Damany Dillard	Seasonal Park Guide	2003
J. Omar Hight	Seasonal Park Guide	2003
Jordan Kathany	Seasonal Park Guide	2003
LaSeanda Nicholson	Seasonal Park Guide	2003
Lamar Parker	Seasonal Park Guide	2003
Jessica White	Seasonal Park Guide	2003

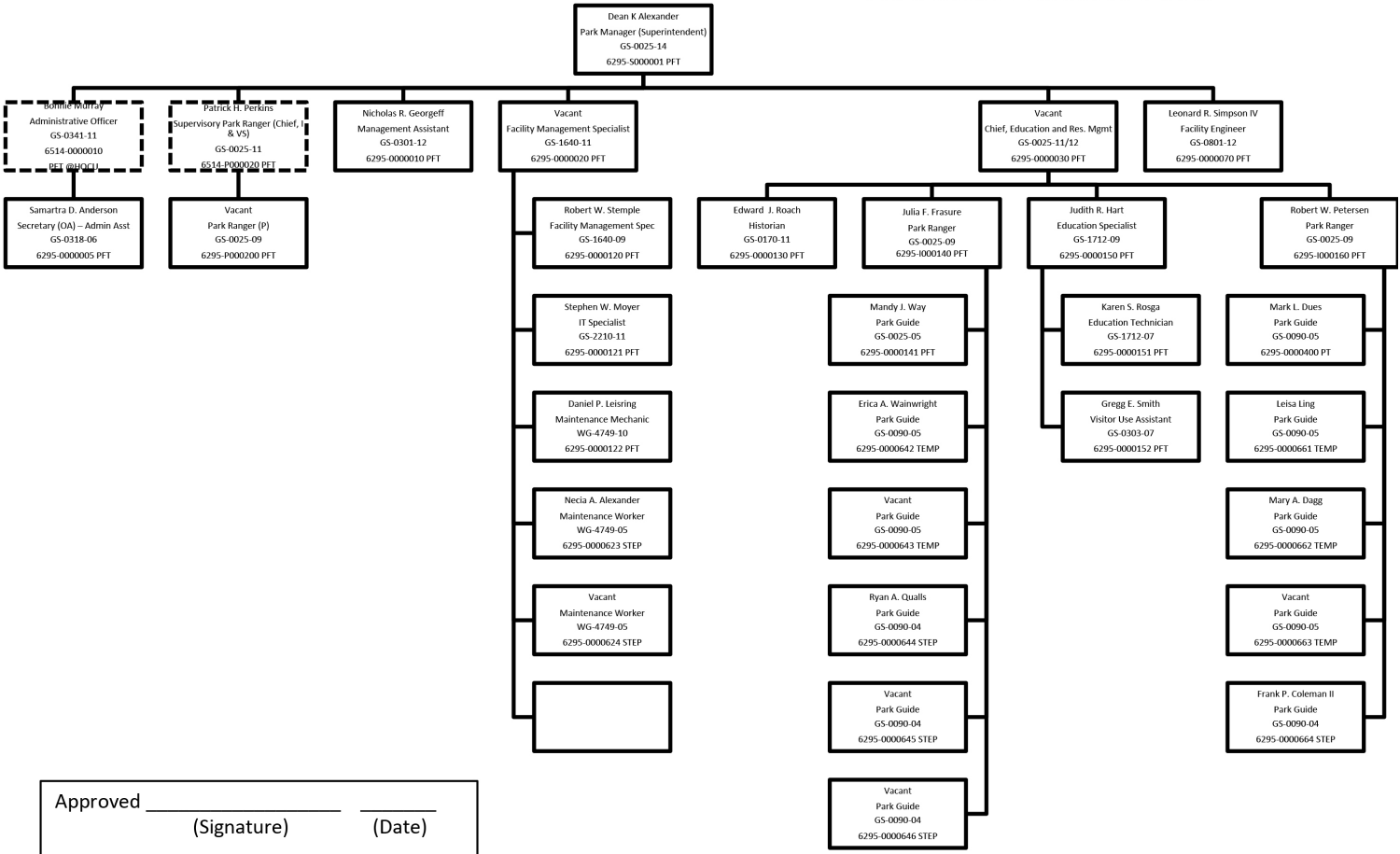
Appendix D

Facilities and Maintenance		
Necia Alexander	Facilities Manager	2011-Present
	Facilities Management Trainee	2010-2011
	Maintenance Mechanic	2008-2010
Bob Stemple	Facilities Management Specialist	2006-Present
	Maintenance Worker	2003-2006
Leonard Simpson	Facilities Engineer	2001-2010
Steve Moyer	Information Technology Specialist	2006-2014
	Utility System Operator/Repairer	2003-2006
Daniel Leisring	Maintenance Mechanic	2008-2011
Mitchell Gearhardt	Maintenance Mechanic	2008-2011
Joseph Ludolph	Maintenance Mechanic	2008-2009
R. Matthew Ruchti	Maintenance Worker	2014-Present
Samuel Bowlin	Manitenance Worker	2016-2018
Donald Hill	Maintenance Worker	2003-2006
Kevin Kessler	Seasonal General Engineer	2003
Brian Fowls	Seasonal Park Guide and Maintenance Worker	2008-2009
Jessica Bragg	Seasonal Laborer	2009-2011
Jessica Edwards	Seasonal Laborer	2009-2011

Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Park

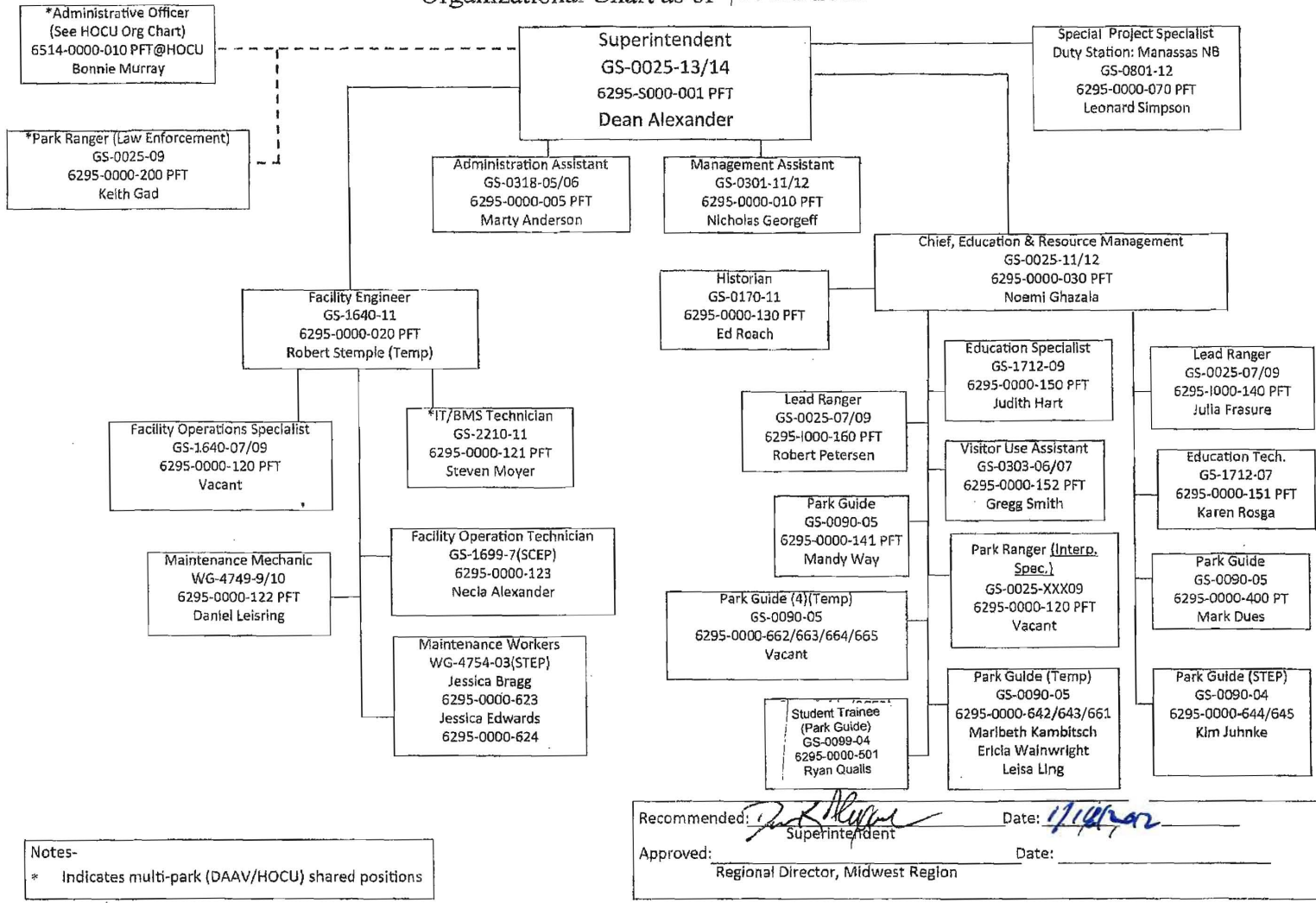
Selected Organizational Charts, 2010–2020

Appendix E



Approved _____ (Signature) _____ (Date)
Title _____

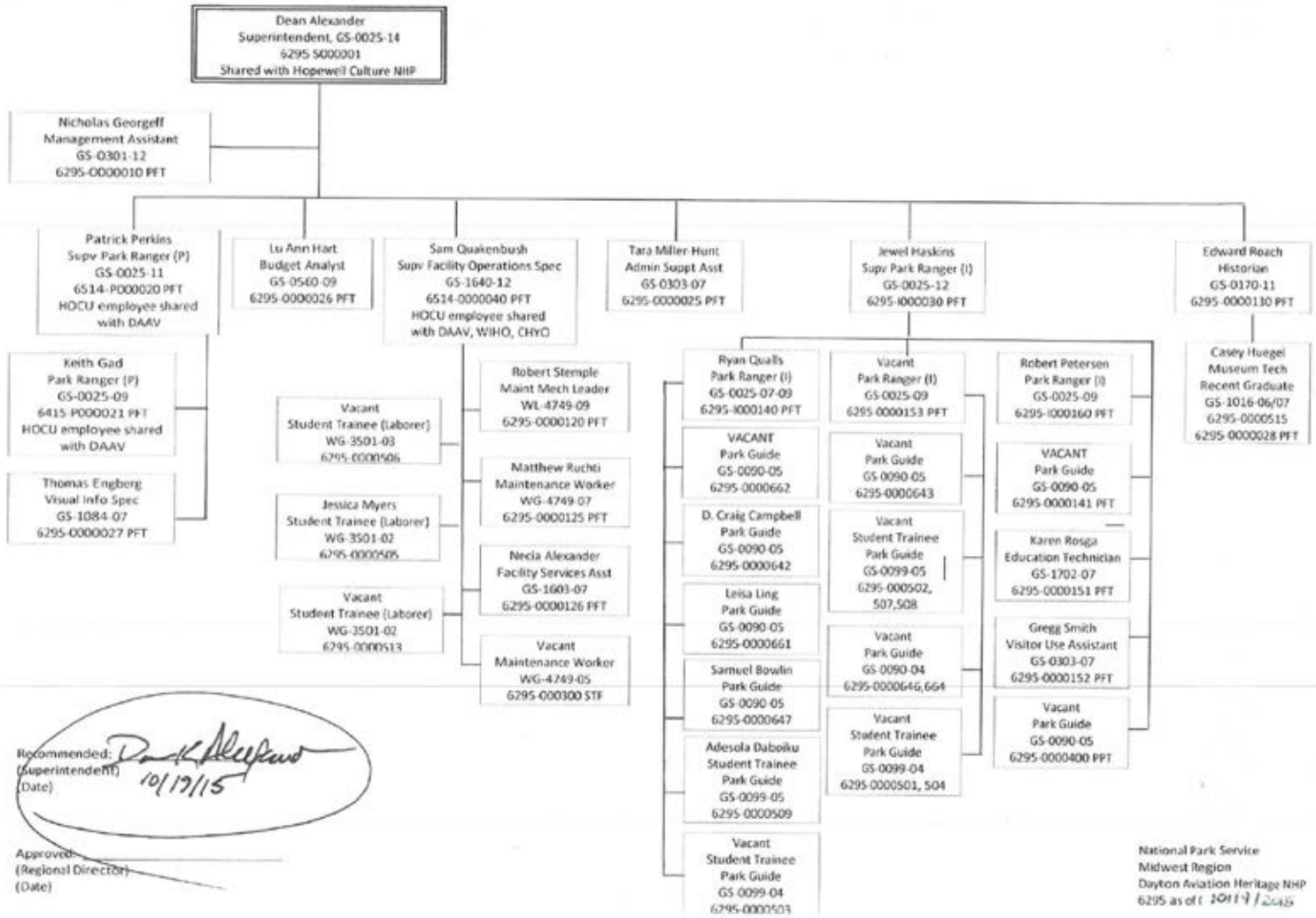
Organizational Chart as of 18 Jan 2012

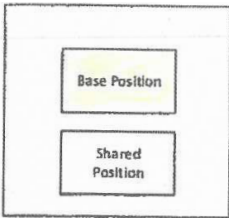


Notes-
* Indicates multi-park (DAAV/HOCU) shared positions

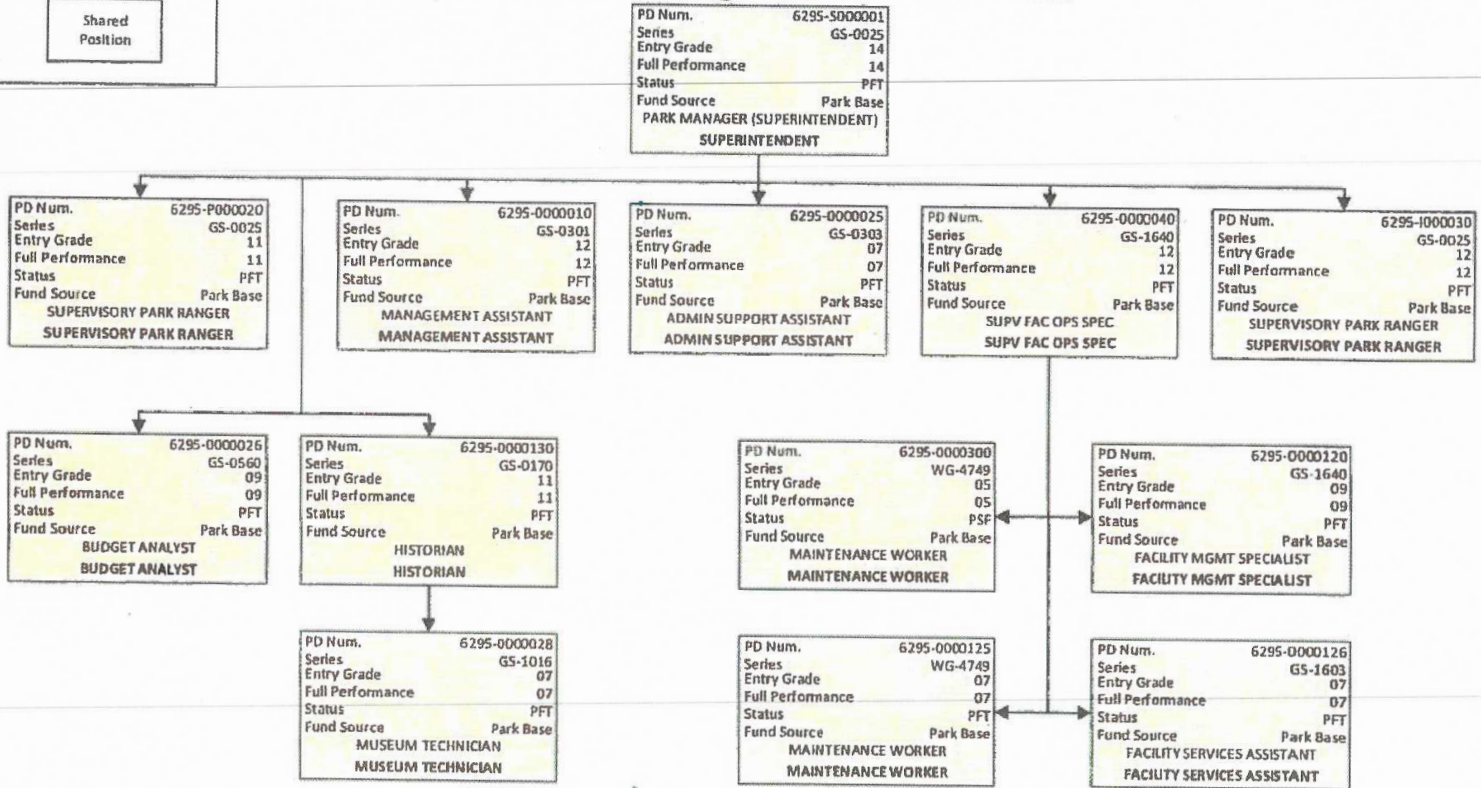
Recommended: *[Signature]* Date: *1/18/12*
 Approved: _____ Date: _____
 Regional Director, Midwest Region

Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Park





National Park Service Midwest Region Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Park

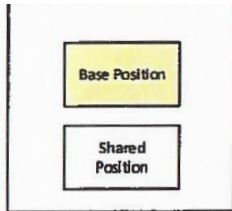


326

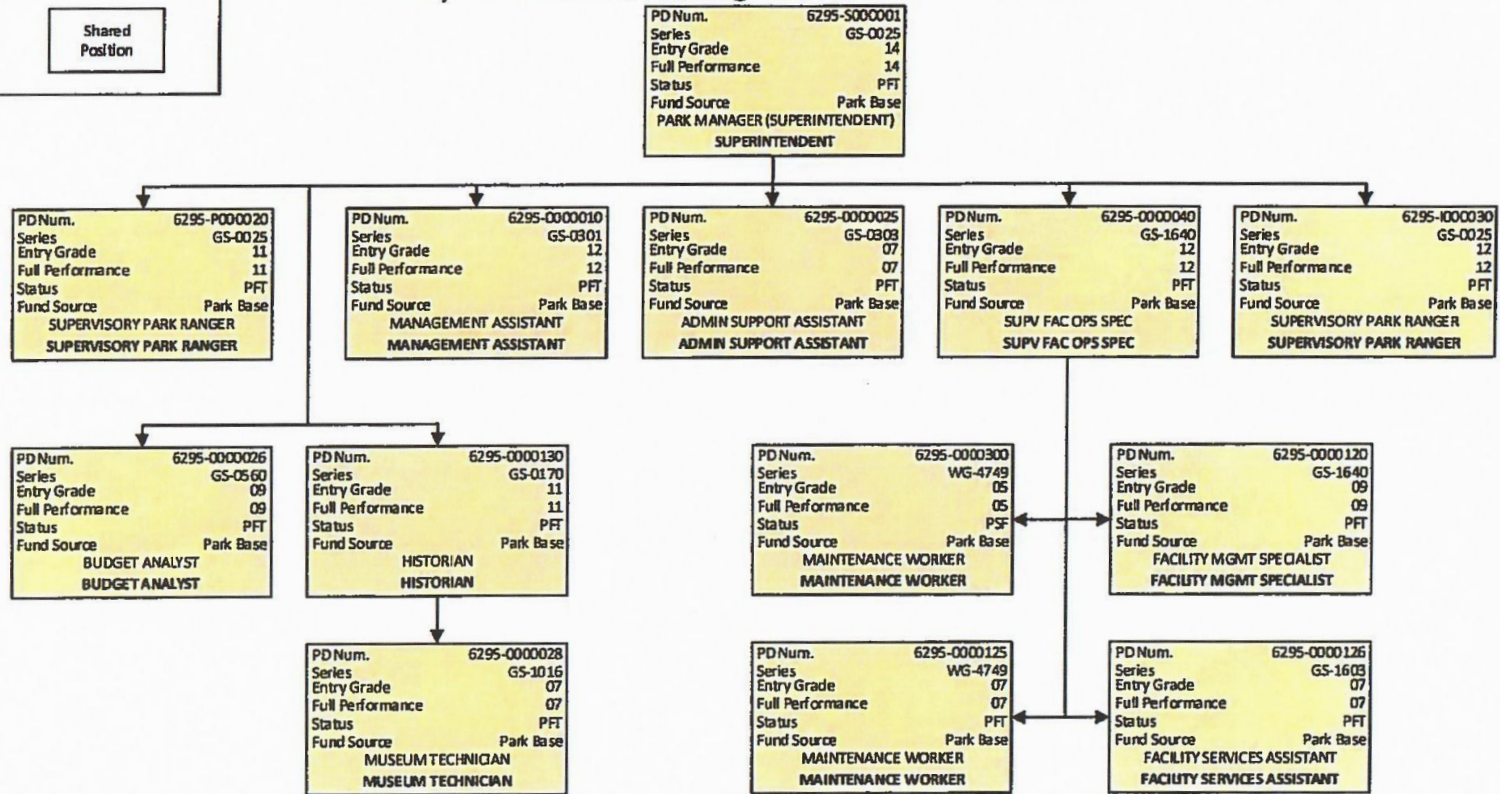
Appendix E

Kendrick A. [Signature] 3/26/18
 Superintendent Signature/Date

Patricia Strays [Signature] 3.27.18
 Regional Director Signature/Date (acting)



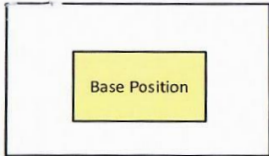
National Park Service Midwest Region Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Park



Kendall [Signature] 3/19/2020
 Superintendent Signature/Date

[Signature] 18 March 2020
 Regional Director Signature/Date

Note: pending as of the date of publication.



National Park Service
 Midwest Region
 Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historic Park
 Interpretation

PD Num. 6295-100030
 Series GS-0025
 Entry Grade 12
 Full Performance 12
 Status PFT
 Fund Source Park Base
 SUPERVISORY PARK RANGER
 SUPERVISORY PARK RANGER

PD Num. 6295-1000140
 Series GS-0025
 Entry Grade 09
 Full Performance 09
 Status PFT
 Fund Source Park Base
 PARK RANGER(I)
 PARK RANGER(I)

PD Num. 6295-1000160
 Series GS-0025
 Entry Grade 09
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 Status PFT
 Fund Source Park Base
 PARK RANGER (INTERPRETATION)
 PARK RANGER (INTERPRETATION)

PD Num. 6295-1000153
 Series GS-0025
 Entry Grade 09
 Full Performance 09
 Status PFT
 Fund Source Park Base
 PARK RANGER (INTERPRETATION)
 PARK RANGER (INTERPRETATION)

PD Num. 6295-0000152
 Series GS-0303
 Entry Grade 07
 Full Performance 07
 Status PFT
 Fund Source Park Base
 VISITOR USE ASSISTANT
 VISITOR USE ASSISTANT

PD Num. 6295-0000151
 Series GS-1702
 Entry Grade 07
 Full Performance 07
 Status PFT
 Fund Source Park Base
 EDUCATION TECHNICIAN
 EDUCATION TECHNICIAN

PD Num. 6295-0000144 0302
 Series GS-0090
 Entry Grade 05
 Full Performance 05
 Status PFT
 Fund Source Park Base
 PARK GUIDE
 PARK GUIDE

Appendix F

Relevant Legislation

PUBLIC LAW 102-419—OCT. 16, 1992

106 STAT. 2141

Public Law 102-419
102d Congress

An Act

To establish the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park in the State of Ohio, and for other purposes.

Oct. 16, 1992
[H.R. 2321]

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Act of 1992”.

SEC. 2. PURPOSES.

The purposes of this Act are—

(1) to establish a unit of the National Park System in Dayton, Ohio, consisting of certain lands and structures associated with Wilbur and Orville Wright and the early development of aviation; and

(2) to create partnerships among Federal, State, and local governments and the private sector to preserve, enhance, and interpret for present and future generations the historic and cultural structures, districts, and artifacts in Dayton and the Miami Valley in the State of Ohio, which are associated with the Wright brothers, the invention and development of aviation, or the life and works of Paul Laurence Dunbar, and which, as a whole, represent a nationally significant resource.

Dayton Aviation
Heritage
Preservation Act
of 1992.
Conservation.
16 USC 410ww
note.
16 USC 410ww
note.

TITLE I—DAYTON AVIATION HERITAGE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

SEC. 101. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DAYTON AVIATION HERITAGE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK.

16 USC 410ww.

(a) **ESTABLISHMENT.**—There is established, as a unit of the National Park System in the State of Ohio, the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park (hereinafter in this Act referred to as the “park”).

(b) **AREA INCLUDED.**—The park shall consist of the following sites, as generally depicted on a map entitled “Proposed Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park”, numbered NHP-DAH 80,000, and dated February 1992:

(1) A core parcel in Dayton, Ohio, which shall consist of the Wright Cycle Company Building, Hoover Block, and lands between.

(2) Huffman Prairie Flying Field, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio.

(3) The Wright 1905 Flyer and Wright Hall, Dayton, Ohio.

(4) The Paul Laurence Dunbar home, Dayton, Ohio.

106 STAT. 2142

PUBLIC LAW 102-419—OCT. 16, 1992

16 USC
410ww-1.**SEC. 102. PROTECTION OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES.**

(a) **ACQUISITION OF PROPERTIES WITHIN THE PARK.**—Within the boundaries of the park the Secretary shall, subject to the availability of appropriated funds, acquire the Wright Cycle Company Building and Hoover Block, and may acquire other properties, or interests therein, referred to in section 101(b), by donation, purchase with donated or appropriated funds, exchange, or transfer.

(b) **COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS.**—The Secretary is authorized to enter into cooperative agreements with other Federal agencies, State and local public bodies, and private interests and organizations relating to the preservation, development, use, and interpretation of properties within the boundaries of the park in order to contribute to the appropriate use and management of such properties consistent with the purposes of this Act. Such agreements shall provide, whenever appropriate, that—

(1) the public may have access to any such property at specified reasonable times for purposes of viewing such property or the exhibits or attending programs established by the Secretary under this subsection; and

(2) the Secretary may make such improvements to any such property as the Secretary deems necessary after consultation with the Commission to enhance the public use and enjoyment of such property and programs.

16 USC
410ww-2.**SEC. 103. PARK GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN.**

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Not later than 3 complete fiscal years after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary, with the advice of the Commission, shall prepare and submit to the Congress a general management plan for the park which includes but is not limited to the information described in section 12(b) of the Act of August 18, 1970 (16 U.S.C. 1a-7(b)), and which takes into account the preservation and development plan developed under section 202.

(b) **PARK PARTNERSHIPS.**—The management plan shall identify partnership opportunities between the Secretary and other Federal, State, and local governments and the private sector for the development, use, and interpretation of properties within the park.

16 USC
410ww-3.**SEC. 104. STUDIES.**

The Secretary shall study the following properties to determine the feasibility and suitability of including them within the park:

(1) Properties within the Wright-Dunbar Historic District.

(2) Wright Company Factory, Dayton, Ohio. A report of the study of such properties shall be submitted as part of the general management plan required by section 103.

Reports.

16 USC
410ww-4.**SEC. 105. GENERAL ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS.**

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—The park shall be administered in accordance with this Act and with the provisions of law generally applicable to units of the National Park System, including, but not limited to, the Act entitled “An Act to establish a National Park Service, and for other purposes”, approved August 25, 1916 (39 Stat. 535; 16 U.S.C. 1-4).

(b) **DONATIONS.**—The Secretary may accept donations of funds, property, or services from individuals, foundations, corporations, and other private entities, and from public entities, for the purposes of managing the park.

(c) **PROGRAMS.**—The Secretary may sponsor, coordinate, or enter into cooperative agreements for educational or cultural programs related to the park as the Secretary considers appropriate to carry out the purposes of this Act.

(d) **IDENTIFICATION AND MARKING OF SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL SITES.**—The Secretary may identify other significant sites related to the Wright brothers, the history of aviation, or Paul Laurence Dunbar in the Miami Valley which are related to the park, and, with the consent of the owner or owners thereof, may mark the sites appropriately and make reference to them in any interpretive literature. The Secretary may provide interpretive markers along transportation routes leading to units of the park.

(e) **INTERPRETATION OF HUFFMAN PRAIRIE FLYING FIELD.**—The Secretary may provide interpretation of Huffman Prairie Flying Field on Wright Brothers Hill, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio.

SEC. 106. COOPERATION OF FEDERAL AGENCIES.

16 USC
410ww-5.

Any Federal entity conducting or supporting activities directly affecting the park shall—

(1) consult with, cooperate with, and to the maximum extent practicable, coordinate its activities with the Secretary; and

(2) conduct or support such activities in a manner which—

(A) to the maximum extent practicable is consistent with the standards and criteria established pursuant to section 202(b)(9); and

(B) to the maximum extent practicable will not have an adverse effect on the historic resources of the park.

SEC. 107. COORDINATION BETWEEN THE SECRETARY AND THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE.

16 USC
410ww-6.

The decisions concerning the execution of this Act as it applies to properties under control of the Secretary of Defense shall be made by such Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of Interior.

SEC. 108. ASSISTANCE.

16 USC
410ww-7.

(a) **TECHNICAL AND PRESERVATION ASSISTANCE.**—The Secretary may provide to any owner of property within the park, and to any organization having an agreement with the Secretary under section 102(b), such technical assistance as the Secretary considers appropriate to carry out the purposes of this Act.

(b) **INTERPRETATIVE MATERIALS.**—The Secretary is authorized to publish interpretative materials for historic aviation resources in the Miami Valley.

SEC. 109. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

16 USC
410ww-8.

There is authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out this title: *Provided*, That the amount to be appropriated for the operation, development or restoration of non-federally owned properties within the boundaries of the park shall not exceed \$200,000.

TITLE II—DAYTON AVIATION HERITAGE COMMISSION

16 USC
410ww-21.

SEC. 201. DAYTON AVIATION HERITAGE COMMISSION.

(a) **ESTABLISHMENT.**—There is established the Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission 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, or Paul Laurence Dunbar.

(b) **MEMBERSHIP.**—The Commission shall consist of 13 members as follows:

(1) 3 members appointed by the Secretary, who shall have demonstrated expertise in aviation history, black history and literature, aviation technology, or historic preservation, at least one of whom shall represent the National Park Service.

(2) 3 members appointed by the Secretary from recommendations submitted by the Governor of the State of Ohio, who shall have demonstrated expertise in aviation history, black history and literature, aviation technology, or historic preservation, at least one of whom shall represent the Ohio Historical Society.

(3) 1 member appointed by the Secretary of Defense, who shall represent Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

(4) 3 members appointed by the Secretary from recommendations submitted by the City Commission of Dayton, Ohio, at least one of whom shall reside near the core parcel of the park (as described in section 101(b)(1)).

(5) 1 member appointed by the Secretary from recommendations submitted by the Board of Commissioners of Montgomery County, Ohio.

(6) 1 member appointed by the Secretary from recommendations submitted by the Board of Commissioners of Greene County, Ohio.

(7) 1 member appointed by the Secretary from recommendations submitted by the City Council of Fairborn, Ohio.

(c) **TERMS.**—(1) Members shall be appointed for terms of 3 years. A member may be reappointed only 3 times unless such member was originally appointed to fill a vacancy pursuant to subsection (e)(1), in which case such member may be reappointed 4 times. A member may serve after the expiration of his term until a successor is appointed.

(2) The Secretary shall appoint the first members of the Commission within 30 days after the date on which the Secretary has received all of the recommendations for appointment pursuant to subsections (b) (2), (4), (5), (6), and (7).

(d) **CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR.**—The chair and vice chair of the Commission shall be elected by the members of the Commission. The terms of the chair and vice chair shall be 2 years. The vice chair shall serve as chair in the absence of the chair.

(e) **VACANCY.**—(1) Any vacancy in the Commission shall be filled in the same manner in which the original appointment was made, except that the Secretary responsible for such appointment shall fill any such vacancy within 30 days after receiving a recommendation for the position.

(2) A member appointed to fill a vacancy shall serve for the remainder of the term for which his predecessor was appointed.

A member may serve after the expiration of his term until his successor has taken office.

(f) **QUORUM.**—A majority of the members of the Commission then serving shall constitute a quorum, but a lesser number may hold hearings.

(g) **MEETINGS.**—The Commission shall meet not less than 3 times a year at the call of the chair or a majority of its members.

(h) **PAY.**—(1) Except as provided in paragraph (2), members of the Commission shall serve without pay.

(2) Members of the Commission who are full-time officers or employees of the United States shall receive no additional pay by reason of their service on the Commission.

(3) While away from their homes or regular places of business in the performance of services for the Commission, members of the Commission shall be allowed travel expenses, including per diem in lieu of subsistence, in the same manner as persons employed intermittently in the Government service are allowed expenses under section 5703 of title 5, United States Code.

(i) **FACA.**—Section 14(b) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App.) shall not apply to the Commission.

(j) **TERMINATION.**—The Commission shall cease to exist on January 1, 2004.

SEC. 202. DAYTON HISTORIC RESOURCES PRESERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN.

16 USC
410ww-22.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—Within 2 years after the date on which the Commission conducts its first meeting, the Commission shall submit to the Secretary a preservation and development plan which may include the Wright-Dunbar Historic District, the Dunbar Historic District, the Ed Sines House and the Daniel Fitch House, and the 45 sites identified in Appendix A of the document entitled “Study of Alternatives Dayton’s Aviation Heritage, Ohio” published by the National Park Service. Within 90 days after the receipt of such plan, the Secretary shall approve such plan or return it with comments to the Commission. If the Secretary has taken no action after 90 days upon receipt, the plan shall be considered approved. If the Secretary disapproves a plan, the Commission shall submit a revised plan to the Secretary. The plan shall include specific preservation and interpretation goals and a priority timetable for their achievement. The Secretary shall forward copies of the approved plan to the Congress.

(b) **CONTENTS OF PLAN.**—The plan referred to in subsection (a) shall—

(1) set detailed goals for the preservation, protection, enhancement, and utilization of the resources of sites referred to in subsection (a);

(2) identify properties which should be preserved, restored, developed, maintained, or acquired;

(3) include a tentative budget for the subsequent five fiscal years;

(4) propose a management strategy for a permanent organizational structure to enhance and coordinate such resources, and aviation-related properties, and institutions;

(5) recommend methods for establishing partnerships with Federal, State, and local governments and the private sector to foster development and to preserve and enhance such resources;

(6) propose transportation links, including pedestrian facilities and bicycle trails among historic aviation sites including an interurban between the Wright-Dunbar Historic District and the historic resources at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base;

(7) address the use of private vehicles, traffic patterns, parking, and public transportation;

(8) propose educational and cultural programs to encourage appreciation of such resources;

(9) establish standards and criteria applicable to the construction, preservation, restoration, alteration, and use of the properties among such resources;

(10) establish an index which shall contain documentary evidence of historical and cultural significance and which includes property in the Miami Valley associated with the Wright brothers, the history of aviation, or Paul Laurence Dunbar.

(c) **CONSULTATION.**—In developing the plan, the Commission shall consult with appropriate officials of any local government or Federal or State agency which has jurisdiction over historic aviation resources in the Miami Valley area. The Commission shall also consult with property owners and business, historic, professional, neighborhood, and citizen organizations affected by the actions proposed in the plan.

16 USC
410ww-23.

SEC. 203. GENERAL POWERS OF THE COMMISSION.

(a) **HEARINGS.**—The Commission may hold such hearings, sit and act at such times and places, take such testimony, and receive such evidence as the Commission may deem advisable.

(b) **DONATIONS.**—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Commission may seek and accept donations of funds, property, or service from individuals, foundations, corporations, and other private entities and public entities for the purpose of carrying out its duties.

(c) **USE OF FUNDS TO OBTAIN MONEY.**—The Commission may use its funds to obtain money from any source under any program or law requiring the recipient of such money to make a contribution in order to receive such money.

(d) **MAIL.**—The Commission may use the United States mails in the same manner and upon the same conditions as other departments and agencies of the United States.

(e) **USES OF ACQUIRED ASSETS.**—Any revenues or other assets acquired by the Commission by donations, the lease or sale of property, or fees for services shall be available to the Commission, without fiscal year limitations, to be used for any function of the Commission.

(f) **HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL PROGRAMS.**—The Commission is authorized to carry out historical, educational, or cultural programs which encourage or enhance appreciation of the historic resources in the Miami Valley associated with the Wright brothers, aviation, or the life and works of Paul Laurence Dunbar.

(g) **TECHNICAL AND PRESERVATION ASSISTANCE.**—The Commission may provide technical and preservation assistance to owners of property within the districts, sites, and properties referred to in section 202(a) consistent with the purposes of this Act.

(h) **OBTAINING PROPERTY.**—(1) The Commission may obtain by purchase, rental, donation, or otherwise, such property, facilities, and services as may be needed to carry out its duties except that

the Commission may not acquire any real property or interest in real property otherwise than under paragraph (2).

(2) Subject to paragraph (3), the Commission may acquire real property, or interests in real property, in the districts, sites, and properties referred to in section 202(a)—

(A) by gift or devise; or

(B) by purchase from a willing seller with money which was given or bequeathed to the Commission on the condition that such money would be used to purchase real property, or interests in real property, in such district and sites.

(3) Any real property or interest in real property acquired by the Commission under paragraph (2) shall be conveyed by the Commission to an appropriate public agency, as determined by the Commission. Any such conveyance shall be made—

(A) as soon as practicable after such acquisition;

(B) without consideration; and

(C) on the condition that the real property or interest in real property so conveyed is used for public purposes.

SEC. 204. STAFF OF COMMISSION.

16 USC
410ww-24.

(a) **DIRECTOR.**—The Commission shall have a Director who shall be appointed by the Commission.

(b) **ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL.**—The Commission may appoint and fix the pay of such additional personnel as the Commission deems necessary. Such staff may include specialists in areas such as interpretation, historic preservation, black history and literature, aviation history and technology, and urban revitalization.

(c) **TEMPORARY SERVICES.**—Subject to such rules as may be adopted by the Commission, the Commission may procure temporary and intermittent services to the same extent as is authorized by section 3109(b) of title 5, United States Code, but at rates determined by the Commission to be reasonable.

(d) **DETAIL.**—Upon request of the Commission, the head of any Federal agency represented by a member on the Commission may detail, on a reimbursable basis, any of the personnel of such agency to the Commission to assist it in carrying out its duties under this Act.

(e) **ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT.**—The Administrator of the General Services Administration shall provide to the Commission on a reimbursable basis such administrative support services as the Commission may request.

(f) **STATE AND LOCAL SERVICES.**—The Commission may accept the services of personnel detailed from the State or any political subdivision of the State and may reimburse the State or such political subdivision for such services.

(g) **INAPPLICABILITY OF CERTAIN PROVISIONS OF TITLE 5, UNITED STATES CODE.**—The director and staff of the Commission may be appointed without regard to the provisions of title 5, United States Code, governing appointments in the competitive service, and may be paid without regard to the provisions of chapter 51 and subchapter III of chapter 53 of such title relating to classification and General Schedule pay rates, except that no individual so appointed may receive pay in excess of the annual rate of basic pay payable for grade GS-15 of the General Schedule.

106 STAT. 2148

PUBLIC LAW 102-419—OCT. 16, 1992

16 USC
410ww-25.

SEC. 205. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

There are authorized to be appropriated annually to the Commission to carry out its duties under this Act \$350,000, except that the Federal contribution to the Commission shall not exceed 50 percent of the annual costs to the Commission in carrying out those duties.

Approved October 16, 1992.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—H.R. 2821:

HOUSE REPORTS: No. 102-449 (Comm. on Interior and Insular Affairs).

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Vol. 138 (1992):

Mar. 3, 4, considered and passed House.

Sept. 9, considered and passed Senate, amended.

Sept. 10, Senate vitiated passage.

Oct. 1, considered and passed Senate, amended.

Oct. 4, House concurred in Senate amendments.

WEEKLY COMPILATION OF PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS, Vol. 28 (1992):

Oct. 16, Presidential statement.



PUBLIC LAW 106–356—OCT. 24, 2000

114 STAT. 1391

Public Law 106–356
106th Congress

An Act

To amend the Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Act of 1992 to clarify the areas included in the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park and to authorize appropriations for that park.

Oct. 24, 2000
[H.R. 5036]

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Amendments Act of 2000”.

Dayton Aviation
Heritage
Preservation
Amendments Act
of 2000.
16 USC 410ww
note.

SEC. 2. REVISION OF DAYTON AVIATION HERITAGE PRESERVATION ACT OF 1992.

(a) **AREAS INCLUDED IN PARK.**—Section 101(b) of the Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Act of 1992 (16 U.S.C. 410ww(b)) is amended to read as follows:

“(b) **AREAS INCLUDED.**—The park shall consist of the following sites, as generally depicted on a map entitled ‘Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park’, numbered 362–80,010 and dated September 1, 2000:

Ohio

“(1) A core parcel in Dayton, Ohio, which shall consist of the Wright Cycle Company building, Hoover Block, and lands between.

“(2) The Setzer building property (also known as the Aviation Trail building property), Dayton, Ohio.

“(3) The residential properties at 26 South Williams Street and at 30 South Williams Street, Dayton, Ohio.

“(4) Huffman Prairie Flying Field, located at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio.

“(5) The Wright 1905 Flyer III and Wright Hall, including constructed additions and attached structures, known collectively as the John W. Berry, Sr. Wright Brothers Aviation Center, Dayton, Ohio.

“(6) The Paul Laurence Dunbar State Memorial, Dayton, Ohio.”.

(b) **AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**—Section 109 of such Act (16 U.S.C. 410ww–8) is amended by striking the colon after “title” and all that follows through the end of the sentence and inserting a period.

114 STAT. 1392

PUBLIC LAW 106-356—OCT. 24, 2000

(c) TECHNICAL CORRECTION.—Section 107 of such Act (16 U.S.C. 410ww-6) is amended by striking “Secretary of Interior” and inserting “Secretary of the Interior”.

Approved October 24, 2000.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—H.R. 5036 (S. 2959):

HOUSE REPORTS: No. 106-896 (Comm. on Resources).

SENATE REPORTS: No. 106-443 accompanying S. 2959 (Comm. on Energy and
Natural Resources).

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Vol. 146 (2000):

Sept. 26, considered and passed House.

Oct. 5, considered and passed Senate.



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