



Foundation Document Overview

Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park

Ohio



Contact Information

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Purpose



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.



Description

Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park comprises six sites and 111 acres around Dayton, Ohio. Established in 1992, the park commemorates inventors Wilbur and Orville Wright and writer Paul Laurence Dunbar through several partnerships.

The fourth Wright Cycle Company building is a location of the Wrights' bicycle shop; they also worked as printers in the nearby Hoover Block from 1890 to 1895. That building houses the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center, which is co-located with the Aviation Trail Visitor Center and Museum.

Paul Laurence Dunbar lived in a home in west Dayton with his mother, Matilda Dunbar, from 1904 until his death in 1906. After Matilda Dunbar's 1934 death, the State of Ohio acquired and opened the house for public visitation as the first house museum commemorating an African American.

Located on today's active Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, the 84-acre Huffman Prairie Flying Field is where the Wrights proved the aeroplane was a practical invention in 1905. At Carillon Historical Park, the 1905 Wright Flyer III is the centerpiece of the Wright Brothers Aviation Center. The world's first practical aeroplane, the Wrights test-flew it at Huffman Prairie Flying Field.

Hawthorn Hill, in Oakwood, is operated by Dayton History. In 1914, Orville, Katharine, and Milton Wright moved into this Georgian Revival style mansion.

The Wright Company factory in west Dayton opened in 1910 as the first purpose-built aeroplane factory in the United States, a testament to the brothers' attempt to commercialize their invention. The factory, currently in private ownership, is a new part of the park and is not yet open to the public.

Dayton Aviation is part of the National Aviation Heritage Area. The National Aviation Heritage Area provides visitors with an opportunity to experience several significant sites associated with aviation, including the sites of the national historical park.

Significance

Significance statements express why Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- The Aviation Center within Carillon Historical Park contains the world’s first practical aeroplane, the 1905 Wright Flyer III.
- 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.
- The Dayton region contains numerous historically significant sites directly related to the Wright brothers, Dunbar, or which contributed to the development of early aviation.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Sites of Wilbur and Orville Wright’s Invention and Industry**
- **Wright Brothers Collections**
- **Paul Laurence Dunbar House and Collections**
- **Hawthorn Hill**
- **Partnerships**

Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center and Wright Memorial**
- **National Register of Historic Places Districts**
- **Threatened and Endangered Species**
- **Trail Connections**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- Raised by a single mom, Paul Laurence Dunbar overcame multiple obstacles—poverty, race, and poor health—to become a leader in literature and lay the foundation for future writers, inspiring the Harlem Renaissance. By the time of his death at the age of 33, Dunbar had risen socially and economically to a point aspired to by many Americans through the success of his writings.
- Through the foresight of Dunbar’s mother, Matilda, and the progressiveness of Ohio’s politicians in the 1930s, preservation of the Dunbar house became the first site saved to honor the legacy of an African American—more than 20 years before the modern U.S. Civil Rights movement caught a tailwind.
- The 1905 Wright Flyer III is the world’s first controllable, practical aeroplane, 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 trailblazing company in the aviation industry.
- Huffman Prairie, the original pasture used to test aircraft, encourages people to imagine the danger, challenges, and failures as the Wright brothers resolved the control problems and perfected the aeroplane.
- In the Dayton region, the invention of the aeroplane 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 park is the 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 and was the reward that allowed Orville to enjoy the fruits of his life’s work in the company of his family and others.

