

The Wright Brothers

A pair of brothers from Dayton, Ohio, literally changed the world before Orville and Wilbur Wright unlocked the secrets of flight, human beings were stuck on the ground. It took many weeks to travel great distances. The only way to cross oceans was on a ship. No one besides slow-moving balloonists had seen earth from the sky.

The Wright brothers ran a bike shop in Dayton. Their interest in mechanical things and motion led them to study flying. They read books and articles, studied the research done by many others, and started making plans and models of aircraft. They soon UNDERSTOOD that the key to flight was control.

For a century, engineers had been looking for an aircraft design that could be controlled by a pilot. Gliders had flown and models had been launched, but none were controlled by anything other than the wind. The 1st airplane that could be controlled—up, down, side to side, and when landing—would make history. Several of the Wright brothers' models failed. In 1903, however, they came up with a new design they thought might work. Orville and Wilbur traveled with it to Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. The soft sands on the beach there, blasted by steady winds, made it the ideal site.

December 17, 1903, was biting cold. The brothers were tired and wanted to get home for Christmas, so they decided to give the Wright Flyer a final test. Orville climbed in to the pilot's seat; the brothers took turns taking test flights. With the help of a local crew, Orville aimed the Flyer into the wind and started the engine.

Slowly, shakily—but steadily—the Flyer soared, and 120 feet later, it landed softly. It was the 1st controlled airplane flight in history. The brothers took turns making other flights that day, a total of 4, the longest of which was more than 800 feet.

Word of their success spread quickly. The brothers became world famous. Their INVENTION and hard work paved the way for the aerial world we live in today.

There are dozens of great books about these important inventors. Also, check out these web sites: www.first-to-fly.com, which includes a museum of aviation; and www.nasm.si.edu, the National Air and Space Museum site.