



Aviation History of Columbus, Ohio

Many a boy or girl has dreamed of flying, but few have been able to realize their dreams as early in their lives as Cromwell Dixon. At the age of 14, Dixon built and flew a hot air balloon powered by a "skycycle," which resembled a large bicycle. This momentous event took place in June 1907 at the Driving Park racetrack, for which the neighborhood is named. This young inventor went on to be the youngest licensed airplane pilot in the United States. Curtiss Company hired him to put on flying demonstrations in the states and Europe, and at age 19 he was the first man to fly an airplane across the Rocky Mountains. Unfortunately, he died two months later during a flying demonstration in Spokane, Washington. He is buried in Greenlawn Cemetery.

Around this time Columbus was the spot of the world's first commercial air cargo shipment, which flew from Dayton on November 11, 1910. Ten bolts of silk were shipped on a trip that took 71 minutes, about the time it now takes to drive from Dayton. The plane landed on the Driving Park track. At that time, Columbus did not have an airport.

Columbus resident Jerry Mock made history flying in her single-engine Cessna called, appropriately, *The Spirit of Columbus*. Leaving March 19, 1947, Jerry became the first woman since Amelia Earhart to fly around the world. During her career she broke several records in speed and distance.

Donn Eisele may not be a name as familiar as John Glenn or Neil Armstrong, but he was also one of the early astronauts breaking new ground for NASA. Eisele grew up in the Hilltop area and was a graduate of West High School. His only mission was on Apollo 7, which preceded the ill-fated mission that claimed the lives of Gus Grissom, Edward White and Roger Chaffee. Donn spent 14 days orbiting the earth in 1968; his mission helped make the moon landing possible.

Groveport-Madison graduate Thomas Hennen flew as a crew member on the shuttle Atlantis in 1991.

Though not a Columbus native, Kathryn Sullivan, the director of COSI from 1996-2005, played an important role in aeronautics and women's history. As mentioned, she was part of the first group of women astronauts with NASA. And in 1984 she flew with Sally Ride on the *Challenger* as mission specialist. It was on this mission that she became the first American woman to walk in space. On her second mission, aboard *Discovery* in April 1990, the Hubble telescope was deployed.

The Ohio Connection

Ohio is well represented in the history of aviation and space exploration. In 2003, the nation commemorated the Centennial of Flight, the historic first flight by Dayton natives Wilbur and Orville Wright. Dayton is also home to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and the United

States Air Force Museum. The Air Force Museum is an excellent place to learn more about the Wright brothers and view more than 300 airplanes, spacecraft and missiles.

Several of the pioneering NASA astronauts hail from Ohio as well. John Glenn may first come to mind. Former Senator Glenn made history as the first American to orbit the Earth on February 20, 1962 in his spacecraft called *Friendship 7*.

Neil Armstrong, the first man to set foot on the moon, hails from Wapakoneta, Ohio. Armstrong's first flight was in 1966 on Gemini 8, which accomplished the first docking of two spacecrafts. But he will always be remembered for the Apollo 11 mission that landed on the moon on July 20, 1969.

Judith Resnik, from Akron, was the second woman to go into space; Sally Ride claims the honor of first woman in space. Along with former COSI director Kathryn Sullivan, Resnik was in NASA's first class of women astronauts. Resnik flew her first mission on the space shuttle *Discovery* in September 1984. Unfortunately, she will be remembered as a *Challenger* crew member that went down on January 28, 1986

Several Ohio astronauts have been members of the *Discovery* shuttle crew including Nancy Jane Currie of Troy, Robert Springer of Ashland, Donald Thomas of Cleveland and Mary Ellen Weber of Bedford Heights.

Sources

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