

Local author commemorates Wright Brothers' European flight centennial

In her book, *The Wrights' European Odyssey*, Jane Healy tells of the epic year of the first flight demonstrations. As the Wrights flew in Europe with phenomenal success, in France, then three other air fields in Europe. They made over 300 flights. Largely ignored in America, Europe celebrated in a big way the two Americans who arrived 100 years ago.

This summer Healy crossed the pond to attend the Centennials in honor of the Wright brothers. In Italy, she found a five-day celebration at Centocelle, the field where the Wrights first flew a century ago. Since she was last there the military field has been modernized with new front gates, gatehouses and an entrance of palm trees, a large sculptured eagle alongside a modern Italian jet airplane, surely the most beautiful of all military airfield entrances.

In Germany, on a trip to Potsdam, the royal city with the fabled Sans Souci Palace which Orville flew over, there was no celebration, although a street where the first flight field existed has been named after him. France, however, was a different story.....

Worlds' first demonstration of the airplane at Le Mans

When Wilbur Wright came to Le Mans in the summer of 1908 to assemble the Flyer he was immediately besieged by photographers and journalists. He never allowed the airplane to be photographed, however, and he kept it a secret as he continued working for seven weeks on the airplane.

Le Mans is the auto capital of Europe. It is famous for its annual automobile race on its city streets. Today the popular Le Mans Grand Prix is the largest on the Continent. It was fitting that Wilbur debuted the plane in this town.

His goal and purpose at the time was to obtain the 500,000 franc prize offered by Lazzare Weiler, a French manufacturer. Wilbur worked in solitude to try to put together the artificial bird he had created (as the papers reported). So not much was mentioned in the Le Mans paper before he flew; in fact nothing at all on the day he flew for the first time, August 8.

On the 9th of August, Wilbur's flight was front page news. They spoke of the date of that first flight, that memorable date, of the incomparable master, Wilbur Wright. "The spectacle was both prestigious and charming as he had made two circles on that first flight." No superlatives were spared by the media now in describing the event. On a later page was given the statistics of the 1904-05 Dayton flights; it appears

Wilbur was organized enough to bring them over with him to give to the journalists.

At the same time, Orville, in America, was flying for the \$125,000 prize offered by the U.S. Signal Corps. The French had sent Robert Coquelle to Dayton to verify that the Wrights could fly. But people in Europe still believed they were bluffing.

There was immediate interest about the Wrights, their family, about the city of Dayton which they researched. It was printed there were 85,000 inhabitants of the city.

Since no one had a photograph of the Wrights' home, one was drawn, a box-like structure with the brothers in front of it and published. They spoke of the cycle shop that was started in 1885 and stated one had to admire the simplicity with which the Wrights approached their work.

With a start they woke up to the fact that in Le Mans a world shaking event was going on at the local race track.

Flight at Pau Airfield

The Palm Beach of Europe, Pau, at the turn of the century was a chic resort. During "the season" the equivalent of "The Shiny Sheet" announced the recent noble arrivals and the hotels where they were staying. The cream of English aristocracy and the English king came to this sunny resort at the base of the Pyrenees Mountains.

They transformed Pau into a home away from home as the arrivals established their English customs which were above all sportive. They designed the first golf course on the Continent, the indoor tennis court, the croquet club, the English Hunt, tea parties at the Grand Hotel Gassion. There were English balls and concerts and lecture series (The History of the Art of Music).

One would hardly know they were in France. The "Pau Season" had regular front page columns such as "The Pau Hounds."

They were a sportive bunch. So when it was announced that Pau had snagged the Wrights to demonstrate the new sport, the excitement level was high. Everyone worked toward this grand honor. There was much to be done: housing on the flying field to be built, a grandstand and a telephone installed. The Wrights would be able to announce the time of their next flight. The English banks contributed, of course. The paper also printed the names of all the major French banks who contributed to the coming exhibition. There were articles on the Wrights before they came and nearly every day during their four-month stay.

LE RECORD DE WILBUR WRIGHT

(Clichés de notre envoyé spécial)

Avant le départ du record nan.
M. Léon Bollée explique à Wright le parcours à suivre pour le Prix de la Commission d'Aviation et la Coupe Michelin. A côté d'eux, MM. Hart O'Berg et Fordyce assistent à l'entretien.

Wright accroche son déclencheur.
Le célèbre aviateur ne laisse rien au hasard et tient à faire par lui-même toutes les manœuvres que nécessite le fonctionnement de son appareil.

LES VOLS A DEUX DE WILBUR WRIGHT

Les deux casquettes de M. Painlevé !
Le 10 octobre, W. Wright a accompli, en compagnie de M. Painlevé, de l'Institut, un splendide vol de 1 h. 9 m. 45 s. 2/5, record du vol à deux. Le passager provoqua un faux départ au premier essai, parce qu'en voulant rattraper sa casquette que le vent emportait, il toucha à la corde qui coupe l'allumage. En haut, M. Painlevé avec sa seconde casquette.

Le vol à deux.
Il semble banal maintenant de parler des vols à deux, tant W. Wright évolue avec aisance. En bas, M. Léauté, de l'Institut, président de la Commission Scientifique.

La vérification de l'hélice.
Wright vérifie spécialement les hélices, dont la rupture fut la cause du terrible accident survenu à son frère.

Four vintage newspaper and postcard vignettes covering the Wrights' European visit.

LES HOMMES VOLANTS
Les Expériences de Wilbur Wright au-dessus du champ de courses des Hunaudières