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Hawthorn Hill to mark 100 years

110th anniversary of flight Dec. 24, 2013

By Jane Olt Healy

This year marks the 110th anniversary of Orville and Wilbur's first flight at Kitty Hawk (Dec. 24) and the 100th anniversary of Oakwood's Hawthorn Hill. Orville Wright, his father, Bishop Wright and sister Katharine moved in on April 24, 1914. We know the time of arrival of the Wright family through Bishop Wright's diary - 3:15 in the afternoon. Designed by architect Harry Schenck and based off plantation-style homes in the antebellum South, the mansion faces directly North, South, East and West, it's four porches open to the four winds. Orville also built a widows walk atop the home, usually reserved for seaports to watch ships coming home from Sea. Sadly, Wilbur died in 1912 before he could view the house.

Orville installed his famous 'full-body' shower by his bedroom with shooting sprouts of water at head and waist level.

Orville put his own vacuum cleaning system in the walls, his own heating and plumbing system. He would put the same vacuum system in the walls of the Dayton Engineer's Club.

He also installed the heating system to be directed from the fireplace, he could look down and control the central system from this area - just like a cockpit.

According to former NCR executive secretary Phyllis Vandeman, (and later a secretary at Oakwood High School) Bill Gates came and spent a week living at the Hawthorn Hill before he returned to Seattle to design his own house with many original inventions. Bill Gate's mother



Orville Wright and Charles Lindbergh during Lindberg's 1927 visit to Hawthorn Hill.

came from Oakwood, Mimi Gardner Gates grew up in a house on Schantz Avenue. Mimi's family gave the city

the Gardner pool. Mimi still comes back from Seattle and visits her Aunt in Dayton.

The most famous moment of Hawthorn Hill occurred in 1927 when Charles Lindbergh, staying overnight as Orville's guest, appeared on the small second floor north balcony and gave a speech to the throng of admirers below. Although he'd emphasized he wanted a private visit, the number of people who gathered outside would only be placated with a speech and personal appearance.

The blueprint for the house was used again for the Dayton Engineer's Club on Monument Avenue by the Miami River, so Orville, one of the founders, felt at home. There is a large front hall with a grand staircase, and two wings to the building. A Greek frieze, the key of knowledge, circles the top of the building. In the 1920's Orville would watch the

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planes take off across the river at McCook Field from the Club, an added benefit.

A third time he used the blueprint, scaled down, for the house he built at 116 Acacia Drive in Oakwood. This was for his secretary, Miss Beck and her Mother. Orville was at this smaller version of Hawthorn Hill for dinner every Sunday in the 1940's. The flight path to Cincinnati from the Dayton International Airport, built in the 30's, went directly over Hawthorn Hill. That meant Orville could sit on his porch at night and watch the sky as his invention streaked across the sky.

It must have been a great joy to Orville to sit out and watch the planes flying overhead, their bright-

ness lighting the summer nights.

How amazing to think many passengers were enclosed in the cabins of these stratoliners when once Orville had been one of two pilots on the only airplane in the world.

All those people on their way to distant places, enjoying their ride in the sky as they flew over the man on the side porch who had invented it.

Flight, the most magical of all mankind's inventions. Orville observed the pageant of flight of the first part of the nineteenth century from his home on Hawthorn Hill.

Chuck Yeager broke the sound barrier in 1947. Orville lived until 1948 enjoying Hawthorn Hill and Oakwood. that half century – "It was a quantum leap" as Wick Wright, his nephew, used to say.