



# The AMA History Project Presents: Modeling History of ORVILLE & WILBUR WRIGHT



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## **Airplane Models and the Wrights**

An airplane model started the world to fly! Find that hard to believe, you members of the Airplane Model League of America? It's true! Wilbur and Orville Wright, the Dayton, Ohio, brothers who flew the first successful airplane, drew their first interest in aviation from a tiny model, and made their first experiments with it.

It was way back in 1878, when Wilbur was eleven and Orville seven. Their father, Bishop Milton Wright, came into the house one day with something concealed in his hands.

“Watch, boys!” he commanded. “It'll get away!”

He opened his hands, and “it” leaped straight for the ceiling. It was an odd-looking device of cork, bamboo and paper, with two wings or propellers which whirred in opposite directions under power furnished by twisted rubber bands (sound familiar, doesn't it?). It fluttered and rose and batted itself against the ceiling, and the boys decided then and there that it should be called a “bat.”

Actually it was a helicopter, as 1929 boys would know. Then it was a strange novelty. But it entranced Wilbur and Orville, and as they grew older they made copies of it – copies that became larger and larger until they were too big and heavy for rubber bands to lift them.

And so the Wrights learned the truth of the aerodynamical principle that, as a flying machine doubles its size, it must cube its power.

Those “bats” weren't the only model flying machines the Wrights built. They flew kites interminably, and learned a lot about wings and air currents from them. They developed a game called “Sending Messages” – it consisted of sending a kite up, then placing a small square of paper with a hole in the center around the kite string and letting the wind carry it right up to the imaginary aviator in the kite.

There were other models, too. Model wings – hundreds of them! For when Wilbur and Orville became young men and made aeronautics their hobby, they discovered that if they wanted to know the best type of full-size wing to build, they had to test out the actions of air currents on

miniatures. There was no method. So they built and experimented with model after model – square wings, round wings, curved wings, flat wings. Eventually there was little that models hadn't taught them about wing-surfaces in air.

Their kites helped them, too. For three years before they tried to fly a power machine, they experimented on the sands of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, with gliders. And their very first “flights” were in gliders flown like kites – gliders held stationary in the wind by ropes that kept them from being carried away.

Some of today's model builders are going to evolve the great air-ideas of tomorrow. Will *you* be one of them?

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