



The AMA History Project Presents: History of the CENTRAL OHIO FREE FLIGHT CLUB (COFFC)



Written by GM (01/1998, 04/2004); Reformatted and edited by JS (01/2013)

The following article was written by Gilbert (Gil) Morris in January of 1998 and April of 2004, and submitted it to the AMA History Project in 2013.

A Brief History of Free Flight in Central Ohio

Around 1926, Lou Willis' dad took young Lou, then 12, to an indoor model meet of the Columbus Model Flyers at the drill hall of the old Fort Hayes barracks in Columbus. He was immediately fascinated by a 24" Curtiss Hawk rubber model he saw fly well. He was hooked on the hobby for life and soon joined the club.

Charles Lindbergh's Atlantic crossing in 1927 brought much interest in model building and flying. Meetings of the Columbus Model Flyers were held monthly at the YMCA. Nelson Black and Eddie Conkle were prominent in modeling activities. The club flew in the State Fair Coliseum and had thirty minute stints during the yearly Boy Scout-A-Rama also held there. Outdoor flying was done at the fairgrounds. And would you believe several meets were held in the rotunda of the state house?

Club activities during the middle 1930s slowed, but with the arrival of the gas model, the new AMA, and information about national contests, interest picked up. By 1942, the last year of model contest flying until after WWII, free flight was going strong. Flying sites included Clippinger Field Airport, Price Field, and Port Columbus airport. Some of the free fliers active before the war included Dick Albert, Paul Albert, Gene Bowers, Joe Clifford, Bob Colgrove, Tom Driscoll, Paul Ford, Palmer Fultz, Bill Hale, Walter Helm, Dave Keating, Bill Keller, Fred Mees, Floyd Miller, Eugene Miller, Gil Morris, Jerry Nolin, Jack Port, Chuck Reisinger, Tom Suter, and Dick White.

After WWII, the club found a home in the Union Hall at Cleveland and 5th Avenue. Club members active at this time, in addition to some of those named above, included Bill Amos, Dick Beck, Bucky Chambers, Jack Goldberg, Bill Kaiser, John Peck, Slim Snelling, John Toth, Sid Voris, Bucky Walters, Paul White, Larry Willis, and Roy Vine. Around 1948, a flying field was found at 17th and Joyce. Roy Vine talked a construction company into grading part of it for control line. Then Roy built a huge bushhog and cleared the area for free flight. The ticks became a big problem, but that was solved by a yearly burning by the fire department. Then the club needed money. Again, Roy talked an implement company into disking the field for crops. By then there was no seed money - and anyway, the land was full of lead from 10 years of trap shooting and nothing would have grown.

Other fields of the period used for contests or testing included Sullivant Airport, Lockbourne Air Force Base, Northway Airport, and the OSU Don Scott Airport. In the 1950s, Lou was editor of the club's newsletter, "Stop Watch," which he mimeographed and mailed regularly to club members.

Around 1958, the free flight contingent of the Columbus Model Flyers broke ranks and the Central Ohio Free Flight Club was formed by Lou Willis, Bill Bogart, Doug Joyce, and Floyd Miller. A policy of no dues and minimum formality was its cornerstone. By the mid-1960s, they started flying at a farm at Marysville, including FAI semifinals and team selection finals. Floyd Miller was heavily involved in the FAI program and was USA team manager to Czechoslovakia in 1967. The Marysville field was lost around 1974. For a few years, COFFC flew at Wolfe's farm. Around 1980, the sod farm near Plain City became the COFFC test field. This too was lost in 1993. Some of those active in the 1980s and before, in addition to those already mentioned, included Dick Smith, Bob Lyle, Bob Placier, Bob Perkins, Charlie Bokros, Jerry Fowler, Dick Seymour, Bruce Tidball, and Sam Wright. From the mid-1930s to around 1970, the basement of Halls Hardware was the principal source for model building supplies. Charlie Lewis ran the counter with the help of a number of modelers through the years.

Membership in COFFC as of January 1998 was approximately 55.

Update – SAM (Society of Antique Modelers) was founded in 1965, first consisting of 15 chapters. John Peck was part of this new organization and was issued SAM Chapter #6 for COFFC. It was issued in the name of the COOTS, Central Ohio Old Timers Society. Today, Bill Hale is our recognized representative to SAM.

Membership in COFFC as of April 2004 was 51.

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