



# The AMA History Project Presents: History of the FIRST STATE R/C CLUB

Since 1974



Written by ES (2010); Transcribed, reformatted and edited by JS (03/2015)

*The following was written by Elliot Smith in 2010, and added to the History Project in March 2015.*

## First State R/C Club History

In 1994, I wrote a brief history of our club to celebrate its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This year our club will celebrate 36 years of existence, which in its own right seems rather remarkable. Throughout this time we have, for the most part, held to the single most important precept upon which our club was founded. That was to provide a flying site where all the members would feel comfortable and have fun regardless of their piloting skills and experience. Our emphasis would not be on competitions and organized events, but would welcome the novice and Sunday flyer who just wants to occasionally bore holes in the sky. We would have contests, but they would be “Fun Flies” for all skill levels. In retrospect, this approach has had its drawbacks as evidenced by the few members in attendance at our regular meetings, especially at election time. Fortunately, we have always been blessed with a few members who actively contribute to the well-being of our club, and keep it viable for all the rest. Perhaps recounting the history of the First State R/C Club will inspire some of our less active old and new members.

Our club was founded during the summer of 1974; the bylaws were adopted in September, and the club received its charter and insurance from the AMA in October. Since I was one of the founding members and am the only one with continual membership in the club, it seems appropriate that I should relate some of the circumstances that led to my introduction to radio control and the history of the First State R/C Club.



**1974: Elliott's solo flight.**  
*(Photo courtesy Elliott P. Smith)*

I moved to Delaware from New York in 1972 to accept an engineering position at Spitz Labs in Yorklyn. Their principle product at that time was the design and manufacture of planetariums. This is where I first became acquainted with proportional radio controls, since Spitz was experimenting with one to control some special effects.

I had been an avid model airplane builder from childhood through college, primarily flying U-Control, but also tinkering a bit with escapement radio control. After college, however, Air Force service, a career, and a growing family occupied my time (not to mention my boating activities), and I lost contact with the hobby for about fifteen years.

The concept of proportional radio control of multiple channels observed at Spitz amazed and excited me; I knew it was something I had to get into. Soon I was the happy owner of a four-channel Blue Max and some half-built models that I bought used through a newspaper ad.

At that time, the Delaware R/C Club was flying from a field on Limestone Road where Goldey-Beacom College is now located. This was near my home. I often heard the distant drone of engines, which I had thought were chainsaws in the woods when I first moved into the neighborhood.

My experience at the Delaware flying site was somewhat discouraging. Although the members there were friendly, none seemed to have the time, patience, or interest to teach a beginner. As a result, I rarely got a chance to fly and felt uncomfortable whenever I asked for help.

After a season of frustration, I heard of another club in the area called the Flying Blue Hens. Their field was located where the Christiana Medical Center was subsequently built. The field was small and surrounded by woods and swamps (at least it seemed like that to me), but the fliers I met there were sociable, helpful and encouraging, and I felt comfortable among them.

What was strange is that most of the active fliers were not members of the Flying Blue Hens club. It seems that the Blue Hens had a membership limit of 25, and all the slots were full. Prospective members were welcome to use the field as long as they belonged to the AMA, but they could not join the club. Some of the Blue Hen members who regularly flew tried to change this rule, but were unsuccessful.



*1975: Our first field. (Photo courtesy Elliott P. Smith)*

After a while, we began talking about starting a new club. This became a reality in 1974, when we were able to locate a potential flying site. Colin Gregory, a beginner like me, worked with a gentleman farmer at DuPont who had some acreage in the “soil bank.” This was a government program that paid him not to farm his land, and he was agreeable to let us use it. The field was located in the Wrangle Hill area near the intersections of routes 71 and 72. Access to the field was via a gravel road alongside the railroad tracks for about a quarter-mile. This was a great field.

It had plenty of room for parking, two runways at right angles, and you could fly there in the afternoon. Unfortunately, it had the normal compliment of plane-eating trees. We were fortunate to have this field for about five years. During this time, our club grew to an average of 50 or more members. Each year we had a schedule of events, which generally included a show and building contest at the Concord or Christiana Mall, an auction, a formal invitational Fun Fly with prizes, as well as frequent club fly flies and picnics.

The first few monthly meetings in 1974 of the new RC club were held in members’ homes. An early order of business was deciding upon a name for the club. Several names were considered, and a final vote was taken to choose between The Diamond State R/C Club and First State R/C Club. (Frankly, I personally preferred Diamond State.) In January 1975, we issued our first newsletter and made plans for the year’s activities, which included a mall show and building contest in March, an auction in May, and a Fun Fly in July. Club members were asked to submit suggestions for a logo, and the one that was selected was designed by yours truly. The mall show was very successful and became an annual event (until it was discontinued in 1990 due to lack of

member interest and insurance problems with the malls.) Our first published roster in 1975 shows we had a membership of 33 and dues were \$12 per year. In 1978, we filed for incorporation. At that time, we had 56 members and our dues were \$18 a year.

The club continued to hold monthly meetings in members' homes, or wherever possible, until June 1975, when we obtained our first regular meeting place at the Air National Guard Headquarters at the Wilmington Airport. We met there until February 1980, when we moved to a classroom in Delcastle Technical High School's aviation shop [Aviation Technology classroom]. The aviation shop instructor, Bud Leonard, made us feel very welcome and we enjoyed the hospitality of that school for more than 20 years.

In 1998, the Delcastle aviation shop moved into its own building next to the main terminal at New Castle Airport, where we then held our meetings. When Bud retired in 2002, we found that we were no longer welcome at the Delcastle aviation shop, and for several months we were forced to meet in the lobby of the airport terminal. One of our members, Frank McFoy, graciously offered us a meeting location at McFoy Refrigeration, Inc., where we met until 2008. Currently, we meet at the American Legion Joseph B Stahl Memorial Post #30 on the third Monday of the month. Formal meetings are usually suspended during the peak flying season from June through August.

In the spring of 1979, we were looking forward to a great flying season. In April, the field was rolled and the access road improved, but in May disaster struck. Arriving at the field one weekend morning, we found it had been plowed up by a farmer who had leased the field from the owner to plant crops.

About this time, however, we had met with the county to discuss a flying site at Ommenlanden. The county was agreeable, but the proposed site was currently being farmed and would not be available until the next year. In the interim, we used a field near Odessa that belonged to a farmer who was also an RC enthusiast. This was hardly an ideal field, being small, rough, and far away, but it served its purpose until we officially received a permit to use the Ommenlanden site in 1980.



*February 1985: Ommenlanden field.  
(Photo courtesy Elliott P. Smith)*

The Ommenlanden site was almost perfect. We had more than adequate parking space and enough acreage to lay out an ideal field based on AMA safety suggestions. Our only drawbacks were field orientation (flying in the late afternoon was difficult because of the sun) and occasional troubles with neighbors, who primarily objected to our noise and the infrequent errant plane that crashed onto their property. We believe our neighbors' protests sometimes took an ominous turn.

Once, we found roofing nails scattered along the entryway to our parking lot, and several pilots had trouble recovering their planes when they went down on private property adjacent to our field. It was unproved, but there was always the suspicion that some unknown source of radio interference from our neighbors caused several crashes.

When we were given permission to use Ommenlanden, we were low profile. The county representatives who helped us were concerned that they would be criticized for allowing a relatively small special interest group exclusive use of some of their acreage. We complied with their wishes and did not even put up a sign to identify our field. This may have contributed to our loss of the field to the Kirkwood Soccer Club in 1990. After the fact, several county officials reportedly claimed that they didn't even know we were there.

For ten years, we had an ideal flying site at Ommenlanden, with plenty of room for parking and flying. The runway was smooth, long and flat, and our problems with the neighbors kind of settled down to merely a mutual dislike. Routine events at the field included monthly fun flies, Quickee 500 racing, and the annual Fun Fly, usually held in August. This was our big event of the season. It usually attracted a substantial number of competitors from other clubs and some terrific demonstration flying. One of our favorites was the Malchiones, who always put on an exciting show. The club was also active with demonstration flying away from our field.



*(Left to right) Art Shindel, Hank Wojdak, Bill Boleslawski, Lee Thomas, Jerry Springer, Gordon Roth, and Jack Springer. (Photo courtesy Elliott P. Smith)*

The North East Water Festival in North East, Maryland was an event that several of our seaplane flying enthusiasts attended for several years and we regularly put on flight demonstrations for the DuPont Country Club and other sites. For a while, seaplane flying and RC boating was very popular with some of our members, and weekends sometimes found our most active fliers by the pond at Carousel Farm [Carousel Park & Equestrian Center].

Several other annual events, which we no longer promote, were our spring building contest and show held at one of the local malls, and the contest for the Team Challenge Trophy with the Delaware RC Club, alternately held at each other's fields. For several years, this was a popular event with the winning club considered "The Champs", retaining the trophy, and the loser designated "The Chumps." Both of these events were dropped in the 1990s due to lack of member participation.

In November 1982, we elected Art Shindel as president. Art was one of the founding members of our club and an avid modeler. He also owned Blue Hen Hobbies and was active in all club activities. Regrettably, he was killed in an auto accident that month. In his honor, the club had renamed the Ommenlanden flying site "Art Shindel Memorial Field."

In the spring of 1990, we were greatly concerned about where we could find a new field to replace the Ommenlanden site, which we had to give up in June. Several leads were pursued without success. John Stare and John Harrison prepared a video tape showing our club activities, and made a presentation to Texaco, but they were not willing to let us use any of their land. *(If we let you use our land, we will have to let everyone use it.)* Bob McDonald contacted DuPont, Chris Harkeli contacted Senator Biden's office, and Carl Witt and others actively checked out other possibilities.

In May, Roland Dewey was able to introduce us to Greggo & Ferrara, Inc. They were receptive to letting us use land alongside of their gravel pit, and thanks to Dewey and John Stare, we had a new field. Once again, however, we were faced with the task of developing a suitable flying field out of undeveloped land. With the help of Greggo & Ferrara, the field was leveled and a drainage system installed while members smoothed the field, laid out the pits and runways, and planted grass. In 1990, we had a membership of 55 and our dues were \$45 per year.

We have been at Greggo & Ferrara field now for twenty years. Our membership has generally been between 35 and 45 members during this time. Dues for this year (2010) are \$60 for regular members and \$35 for senior members over 65 years of age.

Some pictures submitted by members...



*April 1985: Club models at the Concord Mall show.  
(Photo courtesy Elliott P. Smith)*



*1988: Bob George (left) with Frank Donnelly  
(right) and his Diablo. (Photo courtesy Elliott P.  
Smith)*



*1992: Matt Girodano (far left), Charlie Hruska (left, in red hat and jacket), and Greg and John Stare (right and far right) (Photo courtesy Elliott P. Smith)*



*2000: Bud McDade, John Stare, and Tom McNulty (Photo courtesy Elliott P. Smith)*

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