



Meet the Wrights

Having been appointed by the Society to learn about the flying experiments of Wilbur and Orville Wright, you travel by train to Dayton. The trip takes about 2 hours, and when you arrive in Dayton, you ask for directions to the Wright Cycle Shop located on West Third Street. You catch the streetcar as directed.

Instead of going directly to the cycle shop, you decide to talk first with the neighbors. You run into a bunch of kids playing in the street and ask them what they know of the Wright Brothers. "They can fix anything," says one youngster. "They're good with bicycles," says another. "I like their kites!" pipes in another.

This is what you came to hear. "Last year, Wilbur made the biggest, best kite!" a boy declares. "It had two wings, was 5 feet across, and had four strings to it, one to each corner. When he pulled on the strings, the kite twisted and dove through the air. He could make it go any direction and he just about dove it into us kids. It really scared us!"

You thank the kids. Near the bicycle shop, you introduce yourself to a lady sitting on her porch. Does she know the Wrights? "Indeed I do, ever since they was little," she says. "Oh, they was always up to somethin', they was. They used to publish their own newspaper. Now they fix and sell bicycles. They really don't talk too much," she continued. "I hear tell they're buildin' some big flyin' contraption in their shop, but I ain't seen nothin'. I'd ask, but they pretty much like to keep to theirselves." You thank her, and go over to the cycle shop.

As you enter the shop, a tall man with sharp features comes out of the back room and introduces himself as Wilbur Wright. He asks you if he can help you, and you pretend to be interested in a bicycle. He shows you several makes, including some that he and his brother Orville designed themselves.

As you look at bicycles, you talk about a number of things. A shorter man in a derby hat comes in and Wilbur introduces him as his brother, Orville. As you talk about bicycles and transportation in general, you mention something about Octave Chanute and glider flights on the Indiana dunes. The eyes of both brothers light up at this, and they mention that they too have done a bit of research on the subject of flight. Wilbur says the key to success is being able to control a craft in the air. "The lack of control," says Orville, "cost Lilienthal and others their lives." The brothers say that they plan to carry out some experiments in North Carolina in the fall, but don't offer any more details. You shake hands and leave the shop.

Before you return to Cincinnati, you decide you are just too curious; you can't resist trying to get a look at whatever's in the back of the cycle shop. You wait until evening and slip around to the back of the shop. Looking in through a dirty window, you see the biggest kite or glider you ever saw. Although it's difficult to make out in the dim light, you see that it has two wings, one above the other. The wings must be 15 or 20 feet in length! At last, afraid of being discovered, you head for the train station and manage to catch the last train of the night back to Cincinnati.



Wilbur Wright working in the Wright Cycle Shop.



