

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
1985 SESSION  
RATIFIED BILL

RESOLUTION 57  
SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 1296

A JOINT RESOLUTION REPUDIATING THE CLAIM THAT THE WRIGHT BROTHERS DID NOT MAKE THE FIRST FLIGHT AND EXPRESSING NORTH CAROLINA'S PRIDE IN THE HISTORIC ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE WRIGHT BROTHERS.

Whereas, it is a wind-swept stretch of sand at Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina. It is aviation's mecca. It is where the Wright Brothers made the first successful, sustained, controlled flight in a heavier than air, powered machine on December 17, 1903. It is ground over which every pilot, aviation enthusiast, North Carolinian and American should walk; and

Whereas, each year many people who visit say that they experience a special sense of spirit when they silently walk the distance of the Wright's first flight and contemplate the enthusiasm and dedication of the Brothers in overcoming the enormous difficulties of designing an airplane and learning to fly; and

Whereas, there are so few historical sites in aviation that have been preserved for following generations. It was not happenstance that the location of mankind's first successful powered flight remains open to the public. It was the direct result of a group of individuals who in 1926 joined together to form what is now the First Flight Society; and

Whereas, Orville and Wilbur Wright, after their historic achievement on the morning of December 17, 1903, continued their experiments and flights in the United States, England, France and Germany for all to see and witness; and

Whereas, they left a legacy of formulas, designs, calculations and innovative flight control systems that remain in use today; and

Whereas, North Carolina, is where aviation began. It is hallowed ground. The events and accomplishments that occurred have been recorded through eighty-three years of aviation history. It is where man's first sustained, controlled, powered flight happened at 10:35 a.m. on December 17, 1903; and

Whereas, North Carolina is proud that Captain William Tate, Kitty Hawk Postmaster, was instrumental in getting the Wrights to choose the Outer Banks for their experiments starting in September 1900. North Carolina is also proud that the historic lift off with Orville Wright at the controls was photographed by John T. Daniels. There were five eyewitnesses of the first flight: John T. Daniels, W.S. Dough and A.D. Etheridge of the Kill Devil Hills Life Saving Station, W.C. Brinkley of Manteo and John Moore of Nags Head; and

Whereas, the North Carolina General Assembly repudiates the contention of a group of Connecticut residents and that State's Legislature, that Gustave Whitehead, a resident of Bridgeport, Connecticut, was the first man to achieve sustained, controlled flight in a heavier than air machine on August 14, 1901; and

Whereas, there is no historic fact, documentation, record or research to support the claim that Gustave Whitehead flew before the Wright Brothers. The Whitehead claim has been discounted by leading aviation historians and the world's largest aviation museum - The Smithsonian Institute; and

Whereas, Bridgeport is famous for another great showman, promoter and circus man, P. T. Barnum, who said, "There's a sucker born every minute."; and

Whereas, the North Carolina General Assembly gives no credence to the false claim that Gustave Whitehead was the first man to achieve flight in a sustained, controlled, powered flight; and

Whereas, the issue has been settled many times by respected investigators, historians and aviation authorities. Dr. John B. Crane, Harvard University, investigated and made a report on Gustave Whitehead's flights published in N. A. A. Magazine, December 1936. He stated the following conclusions:

(1) The evidence that Gustave Whitehead made any genuine, sustained, horizontal flights is inconclusive;

(2) The evidence that Gustave Whitehead made short momentum flights prior to 1904 is inconclusive; and

(3) The evidence that Gustave Whitehead made short momentum leap flights at different times between 1904 and 1908 is conclusive; and

Whereas, we request that the Smithsonian Institute make available the documented information gathered in those investigations; and

Whereas, the people of the State of North Carolina take great pride in the achievements of Wilbur and Orville Wright, and we would like to call the attention of all and sundry to the following points:

Now, therefore, be it resolved by the Senate, the House of Representatives concurring:

Section 1. (a) The Wright Brothers made the world's first successful powered, sustained and controlled flights in an airplane at Kill Devil Hill near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, on the morning of December 17, 1903.

(b) The Wright Brothers demonstrated unique genius as well as extraordinary courage and perseverance in the development of the world's first practical airplane. In so doing, they inspired the birth of world aviation.

(c) The Wright Brothers in these achievements have been affirmed by the President and the Congress of the United States, federal courts, scholars, museums and bright school children everywhere.

Sec. 2. George Bernard Shaw once remarked that society seems to move through three phases in considering a new invention. At first we refuse to admit that the thing has been accomplished. Next we decide that it was not so important after all. Finally, we seem compelled to prove that someone else did it first.

Sec. 3. This resolution is effective upon ratification.

In the General Assembly read three times and ratified, this the 10th day of July, 1986.