



HISTORICAL ACHIEVEMENTS

VALLEY OF THE GIANTS

“When I want to understand what is happening today or try to decide what will happen tomorrow. I LOOK BACK.”

—*Oliver Wendell Holmes*

Ivonette Wright Miller 1896 – 1995

As we approach the 92nd anniversary of the first flight on December 17, 1995, the community mourns the death of Ivonette Wright Miller, a niece of Wilbur and Orville Wright, inventors of the airplane. Ivonette died on October 5 at the age of 99. The author of a popular book about her famous uncles, *Wright Reminiscences*, Ivonette also served as the spokesperson for the Wright family after the death of Orville Wright in 1948.

The December 17th date is particularly associated with Ivonette because of her many years of participating in the First Flight ceremony at the Wright Brothers

Memorial on Wright-Patterson Air Force Base (WPAFB), an annual event that commemorates the world's first airplane flight made by Orville Wright at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, on December 17, 1903. The highlight of past programs was the laying of wreaths at the base of the memorial by Ivonette, her husband, Harold, her brother, Horace, and Horace's wife, Susan. Her husband, Harold, and her brother, Horace, preceded her in death.

Ivonette was born April 8, 1896, in Dayton, Ohio, one of four children of Wilbur and Orville's brother Lorin and his wife, Ivonette. (Wilbur and Orville's other brother, Reuchlin, settled out West and also had four children, three of whom reached adulthood.) Ivonette became a favorite of her two bachelor uncles, who often babysat her. A lifelong resident of the Dayton area, she was a graduate of Steele High School and earned a degree in music at Oxford College, Oxford, Ohio. Her wedding to Harold Miller on June 25, 1919, took place at Hawthorn Hill, the Wright mansion in Oakwood. The couple had three children, only one of whom lived to adulthood, their youngest, Marianne Hudec of St. Paul, Minnesota.

During her almost 100-year life, Ivonette witnessed a dramatic story—the invention and development of the airplane. She was born just a few months before Wilbur and Orville started on their search to unlock the secrets of powered flight; was seven years old when her father took the telegram announcing the first successful airplane flights on December 17, 1903, to the local newspaper, which first thought the event not newsworthy enough to print; and participated with other members of the family in the June 1909 Homecoming celebration welcoming Wilbur and Orville back from a series of highly successful demonstrations of their invention in Europe.

Two years later, in August 1911, Ivonette became the third young girl in the United States to fly, after her sister, Leontine, and her

cousin, Ellwyn. The flight took place at Huffman Prairie (now part of WPAFB) in an airplane piloted by Orville Wright. The experience became one of her favorite stories, one she was often asked to repeat. After about seven minutes flying in circles around the airfield Orville pointed to a traction car approaching on the line near the field and shouted, “Shall we try to catch it?” When Ivonette nodded yes, he quickly landed the plane in ample time for the girls to board the car, which had just stopped to take on passengers.

Ivonette was an honorary member of The Engineers Club. She frequently attended Club events, including the annual Founders Night. Especially memorable among her appearances was the Founders Night in 1989 celebrating the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Club by Edward A. Deeds and Charles F. Kettering. As part of the program, she participated in a reenactment of the ceremony in which the two founders presented the present Clubhouse to the members. Virginia Kettering, daughter-in-law of Charles F. Kettering, represented the founders who donated the building and Ivonette represented Orville Wright, an original Club member and early president, who accepted the gift on behalf of the membership.

Ivonette benefitted the Club in many ways, including the recent donation of Orville Wright's pilot's license for display in the Wright Room. Authorized by an Act of Congress and presented to Orville by the U.S. Civil Aeronautics Authority on June 29, 1940, it is designated as “Honorary Aircraft Pilot Certificate Number 1.” Incidentally, Wilbur and Orville's official pilot's licenses were not numbers 1 and 2 as one would expect, but numbers 3 and 4, issued in 1910 by the Aero Club of America.

Ivonette Wright Miller will be greatly missed by the membership of The Engineers Club and the rest of the Dayton community.

Mary Ann Johnson



VALLEY OF THE GIANTS



William G. Biddle
1901 - 1992

William G. Biddle was an Engineers Club member from 1924 until the time of his death in 1992. As a 15-year-old newsboy, he delivered the *Dayton Journal* to the original Engineers Club building at the

corner of East 2nd and Madison Streets in 1916.

Born in 1901, he graduated in 1919 from Steele High School's Cooperative Education Department (later to become Patterson Co-op), and as an NCR Cooperative Student attended the University of Cincinnati.

He was an active original member of The Dayton Wireless Club in 1916 (of which he was the last surviving member), and in 1917 was one of the first ham radio operators (for which he was later honored with a 70-year certificate from the Quarter Century Wireless Association).

In 1921, Bill founded Dayton's first wholesale business as William Hall Electric (which later became M. D. Larkin Division). He next became radio department supervisor of DP&L's Gas and Electric shop in 1929. In 1931, he became radio department manager for the Anderson Piano Co., and in 1932 joined the Graybar Electric Company with which he was associated until his retirement in 1966.

Mr. Biddle was a long-time friend of Club member Stanley Copp, with whom he helped organize and construct Dayton's first radio broadcasting station. He was also a long-time friend of George Leland, with whom he spent many hours discussing electrical motors and controls.

He was a life-long member of the Institute of Radio Engineers, IRE (now called the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers, IEEE), as well as Dayton Amateur Wireless Assn., Quarter Century Wireless Assn., Old Time Radio Club, Antique

Wireless Club, and the Greater Cincinnati Radio Assn. Other active memberships included the Oakwood Kiwanis Club, Scottish Rite, Antioch Shrine and the Lutheran Church.

For many of his latter years, Bill Biddle was very active in The Engineers Club as its Archivist. Members would call on Bill to enlighten them with respect to events and other Club members, as he kept every Club bulletin and write-up that came his way, and he attended all Club events as well as nearly every luncheon for many years.

Bill Biddle was a splendid example of a Giant who has spurred others to achieve skills and success in our Valley of the Giants!



Sorry ... in last month's Valley of the Giants, we forgot to put in a picture of Ivonette Wright Miller.