

SC-347: Wilbur F. H. Bigelow, Sr., Dayton-Wright Company Collection

Collection Number: SC-347

Title: Wilbur F. H. Bigelow, Sr., Dayton-Wright Company Collection

Dates: 1909-1941 (bulk 1917-1919)

Creator: Bigelow, Wilbur Francis Hinman, Sr., 1897-1968

Scope and Content Note:

Wilbur F. H. Bigelow, Sr., was a foreman in the Mill department of Dayton-Wright Airplane Company factory at Moraine (Plant 1), during World War I. The collection consists primarily of 28 photographs, most of which relate to Bigelow's work at the factory, including DH-4 aircraft, employees and factory scenes, air demonstration shows, and aerial photographs captured during a test flight. Photos unrelated to Dayton-Wright Airplane include: one photo depicts the Wright Brothers' Homecoming in June 1909, one depicting a crash at McCook Field in 1917, one of Hills and Dales Country Club, and five at an unidentified outdoor location. Individuals in the photographs include Wilbur's wife, Helen; his daughter, Janice Pahnke; mechanic Charles Irwin, and pilot Bernard Whelan. Also included are three documents related to Bigelow's WWI draft status, a piece of wing fabric from an aircraft that crashed in Dayton in 1928, and a commemorative coin from the Dayton "Frontiers of Freedom" celebration in 1941.

Quantity/Physical Description: 0.1 linear foot (33 items, including 28 photographs)

Language(s): English

Repository:

Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, Wright State University, Dayton, OH 45435-0001, (937) 775-2092

Restrictions on Access:

There are no restrictions on accessing material in this collection.

Restrictions on Use:

Copyright restrictions may apply. Unpublished manuscripts are protected by copyright. Permission to publish, quote, or reproduce must be secured from the repository and the copyright holder.

Preferred Citation:

[Description of item, Date, Item Number], SC-347, Wilbur F. H. Bigelow, Sr., Dayton-Wright Company Collection, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio

Acquisition:

The collection was donated to Special Collections, Wright State University Libraries, by Janis (Bigelow) Pahnke, daughter of Wilbur Bigelow, Sr., in September 2014. An addition was received in February 2016.

Other Finding Aid:

The finding aid is available on the Special Collections & Archives, Wright State University Libraries web site at <https://www.libraries.wright.edu/special/collectionguides/files/sc347.pdf>. It is also available in the OhioLINK Finding Aid Repository at <http://ead.ohiolink.edu/xtf-ead/>.

Related Material:

[MS-152: Dayton-Wright Airplane Company Photographs.](#)

[MS-192: Andrew S. Iddings Wright Brothers Homecoming Collection.](#)

Existence and Location of Copies:

All items in this collection are available online in Wright State University's Campus Online Repository, CORE Scholar, at: https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/special_sc347/.

Processed by:

Finding aid written according to DACS standards by Lisa Rickey, December 2019.

Arrangement:

The collection is arranged in roughly chronological order.

Biographical/Historical Note:

Wilbur Francis Hinman Bigelow, Sr., was born June 26, 1897, in Vernon County, Missouri. He moved to Dayton, Ohio, with his mother Anna and siblings in 1907. He attended Patterson School through the eighth grade but did not attend high school. He learned woodworking at the Ritchie-Wertz Company and also worked at National Cash Register Company for a while after leaving school.

During World War I, Wilbur was employed at the Dayton-Wright Airplane Company, which had in three locations: Moraine, Miamisburg, and the two former buildings of The Wright Company off West Third Street in Dayton. Wilbur worked at the Moraine location (Plant 1), ultimately becoming the supervisor of the Mill department (wood shop). Because Dayton-Wright (and by extension Wilbur Bigelow) was engaged in vital war work, having contracts to produce 4,000 De Havilland 4 aircraft and 400 J-I trainers, Wilbur was exempted from the draft.

On April 20, 1918, Wilbur married Helen Irwin, whom he had first met in 1916. Her brother, Charles Irwin, also worked at Dayton-Wright, as a mechanic. Wilbur and Helen had 5 children, the first four of whom were born in Dayton.

After World War I, Wilbur worked at National Cash Register and later manufactured and sold dollhouses, as part of the firm Golter, Pook, and Bigelow. In the spring of 1928, Wilbur

accepted a new job at RCA Victor in New Jersey, as production manager in the cabinetry department. The family later moved to Pennsylvania in 1933.

Wilbur F. H. Bigelow, Sr., died on June 19, 1968, in Danville, Pennsylvania. He is buried at Greenlawn Cemetery in Montgomery, Pennsylvania.

Charles Henry Irwin, the younger brother of Helen (Irwin) Bigelow, was born June 12, 1899, in Dayton, Ohio, to Otho Joseph Irwin and Mary Dorothea (Kirchner) Irwin. He attended a co-op high school for two years. When he was only about 18 years old, he went to work at the Dayton-Wright Airplane Company's Moraine factory (Plant 1) as a mechanic, working on DH-4 aircraft. He also worked briefly at National Cash Register. Shortly after his marriage to Alvia Spivey Avery on February 14, 1920, he went to work for the Dayton Power and Light Company and worked there most of his life. After retiring at age 62, he and his wife moved to Florida but returned to the Dayton area later, where Charles died on June 21, 1970.

Subject Terms

Persons/Families

Bigelow, Wilbur Francis Hinman, Sr., 1897-1968

Bigelow, Helen Wilhelmina (Irwin), 1896-1978

Irwin, Charles Henry, 1899-1970

Whelan, Bernard Leonard, 1890-1983

Pahnke, Janis Aline (Bigelow), 1924-2019

Organizations/Corporate Names

Dayton-Wright Airplane Company -- Photographs

Places

Dayton (Ohio) -- History

Dayton (Ohio) -- Pictorial works

McCook Field (Ohio) -- History

Subjects (General)

Aeronautics -- Ohio -- Dayton -- History

Aeronautics, Military

Airplane factories

DH 4 (Bomber)

Material Types

Photographs

Collection Inventory

All items in this collection are available online in Wright State University's Campus Online Repository, CORE Scholar, at: https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/special_sc347/.

<u>Page</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
Photographs on Album Pages			
1	1	Bird's eye view of Dayton, Ohio, taken from atop a building to the southwest of town). The building in the distance with the three tall towers and smokestack is National Cash Register Company (NCR) on Main Street.	Circa 1917
1	2	Several soldiers observe the wreckage of a Curtiss JN-4 "Jenny" biplane, a trainer which has crashed into a hangar door outrigger at McCook Field, Dayton, Ohio. Original caption reads: "McCook Field, Dayton, Ohio, First World War, 1917. Plane crashed into hangar door." Wilbur Bigelow recalled that the pilot was unhurt, but the main problem was finding a ladder long enough to extricate the pilot from the cockpit.	1917
1	3	Two women stand at the entryway to Hills and Dales Country Club, Dayton, Ohio. The woman on the left is identified as Helen Irwin (later wife of Wilbur Bigelow).	Circa 1917
1	4	The image shows one of four triumphal arches, sculpted by Joseph A. Horchert, that was displayed on Third Street and Main Street in Dayton, Ohio during the 1909 Wright Brothers Homecoming Celebration. Horchert worked with Henry Kabierske who designed most of the decorations for the event and worked for Fischer and Sons of Philadelphia. The sculpture, depicting the "Goddess of Victory," was a seated woman holding a model of the Wright Flyer raised in her right hand and supporting a globe in her left. The sculpture was part of the Court of Honor which ran north on Main Street from Third Street to the Soldier's Monument. Duplicate "Goddess of Victory" sculptures were also at the beginning and end of the parade route. Between the sculptures were large columns decorated with flowers and lights. Original caption reads: "Decoration for celebration for Wilbur and Orville Wright, June 1908." (Should be 1909) (A similar photo can be found in MS-192, photo #62)	1909 June
2	5	Unidentified photo of a waterfall with guard railing at the top of it.	Circa 1917
2	6	Unidentified photo of what appears to be a bridge piling in a body of water.	Circa 1917

<u>Page</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
2	7	Unidentified photo of a stream or small river with vegetation on either side.	Circa 1917
2	8	Unidentified photo of a small body of water with a path or roadway beyond it.	Circa 1917
2	9	Unidentified photo of a stream or river with trees growing from small islands within the body of water.	Circa 1917
3	10	Army DH-4 aircraft on the ground during an air show in Moraine, with spectators watching from a hillside in the distance.	Circa 1917-1919
3	11	Five Army DH-4 aircraft flying in formation over the air show in Moraine, as seen from the ground.	Circa 1917-1919
3	12	Two Army DH-4 aircraft performing take-off and landing demonstrations during an air show in Moraine, with spectators in the distance.	Circa 1917-1919
3	13	An Army soldier observes four aircraft flying in formation over the air show at Moraine, while additional planes can be seen on the ground and the crowd of spectators in the distance.	Circa 1917-1919
4	14	Front left view of recently completed DH-4 aircraft on the flight line at Moraine.	1918
4	15	Bernard L. "Bernie" Whelan in full flight gear, standing near the tail of DH-4 aircraft number A-30830, at Moraine. Bernie Whelan learned to fly in 1913 at the Wright School of Aviation and was a test pilot for Dayton-Wright Airplane Company. Original caption reads: "Bernie Whelan – test pilot at Moraine City, Ohio."	Circa 1917-1919
4	16	Aerial view of the Moraine factory and airstrip, including a portion of the wings and rigging. This is the first in a series of aerial photographs taken by Wilbur Bigelow during a test flight. The large bend in the Great Miami River can be seen in the upper left, and a church (possibly Zion Memorial United Church of Christ at the corner of Dixie and Stroop) and its graveyard can be seen in the lower right near the wing.	Circa 1917-1919
4	17	Aerial view of the Moraine and Dayton area around the factory, looking north towards Dayton. Same day as #16.	Circa 1917-1919
5	18	Aerial view of clouds and some aircraft rigging from the right side of the rear cockpit. Same day as #16-17.	Circa 1917-1919
5	19	Aerial view of clouds and buildings below (possibly downtown Dayton or Moraine), as well as a portion of the	Circa 1917-1919

<u>Page</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
		aircraft wing. The Great Miami River and at least four bridges can be seen. Same day as #16-18.	
5	20	Aerial view of downtown Dayton, with the river in the distance. Same day as #16-19.	Circa 1917-1919
5	21	Interior view of the Dayton-Wright Airplane Company, Plant 1, Mill department (wood shop), which was supervised by Wilbur Bigelow. A large American flag can be seen hanging from the beams, and various wooden components are on carts. (A photo of the same area can be found in MS-152, photo #4.)	Circa 1917-1919
Individual Photos (Not Attached to Album Pages)			
	22	Group photo of the Supervision Staff of the Moraine plant of Dayton-Wright Airplane Company, gathered around a DH-4 aircraft. There are 35 people in the photo, including 6 women. Only Wilbur Bigelow is identified, standing seventh from right in the second row (second to right of the propeller), standing, and indicated by a circle around his head. Writing on propeller reads: "Test Propeller #128(?). Return to Motor Assembly." Original caption reads: "Supervision Staff at Moraine City Plane of 'DeHaveland 4' [sic] during World War I, 1918 – Pop had charge of the mill (wood). Wilbur Bigelow Sr. 7 th from right in 2 nd row (standing)."	1918
	23	Back left view of recently completed DH-4 aircraft on the flight line at Moraine. Hangars P-1 and P-2 can be seen in the background. (Photos #14, 22-28 all appear to be taken same day.)	1918
	24	Front left view of recently completed DH-4 aircraft on the flight line at Moraine, with cowling open (engine visible) and two maintenance stands (ladders) near the front left. (Photos #14, 22-28 all appear to be taken same day.)	1918
	25	Three Dayton-Wright mechanics pose during an engine inspection on a DH-4. The man on the left is Charles Irwin, brother of Helen (Irwin) Bigelow and brother-in-law of Wilbur Bigelow. The other two men are not identified. (Photos #14, 22-28 all appear to be taken same day.)	1918
	26	Mechanic Charles Irwin standing next to the DH-4's propeller. Writing on propeller reads: "Test Propeller #128(?). Return to Motor Assembly." (Photos #14, 22-28 all appear to be taken same day.)	1918
	27	Mechanic Charles Irwin standing at back left of the DH-4 next to the rear cockpit. (Photos #14, 22-28 all appear to be taken same day.)	1918

<u>Page</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
	28	Mechanic Charles Irwin sitting in the DH-4's rear cockpit inside the gun ring. Note he has reversed his hat in the manner of a person who might be flying in the plane. (Photos #14, 22-28 all appear to be taken same day.)	1918
World War I Documents			
	29	World War I, Notice of Classification Card, for W. F. H. Bigelow, Order 313A, Serial Number 562, from War Department, Local Board for Division Number 2, City of Dayton, Ohio. Originally marked Classification I, then stamped over with "Classification does not affect Industrial or Agricultural claims."	1918 Sept. 11
	30	World War I, Notice of Classification Card, for W. F. H. Bigelow, Order 313A, Serial Number 562, from War Department, Local Board for Division Number 2, City of Dayton, Ohio. Marked Classification II, D. Industrial Claim. (Bigelow was exempted from the draft due to his existing work in a vital war industry.)	1918 Sept. 23
	31	Certification Card for Vocational Education, Training within Industry, in the area of War Production Job Instructor. Note that Bigelow's first name is listed as "William" rather than the correct Wilbur.	Circa 1918
Objects			
	32	Piece of red wing fabric from the "Red Devil Johnson" airplane, which crashed in front of a large crowd at Johnson Field in Dayton, on May 4, 1928, killing pilot Harold J. Forshay, as well as passengers Walter Clark and Blair Cross. Original caption (on back of fabric) reads: "Piece of wing of Red Devil. Johnson Air Plane. I went up to 2000 ft. on April 12, 1928. (Pilot Forshay.) Plane crashed on May 4 th at 7:30 in evening, went into nose dive killing Forshay, Clark, & Cross."	1928 Apr.-May
	33	Coin (appears to be a stamped penny) commemorating the Miami Valley celebration "Frontiers of Freedom," which was a celebration at the Montgomery County Fairgrounds in honor of the centennial of Dayton's incorporation.	1941 June