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AHS International Recognizes Franklin Institute as First Vertical Flight Heritage Site

ALEXANDRIA, VA – AHS International, the world's premier professional vertical flight technical society, will recognize the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania as its first Vertical Flight Heritage Site. A ceremony will be held at the Franklin Institute on Sunday, October 27, 2013 at 5:30 p.m.

The First Rotating Wing Aircraft Meeting was held by the Philadelphia Chapter of the Institute of Aeronautical Sciences (IAS, the forerunner of today's American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, AIAA) in the Franklin Institute's Aviation Hall on October 27-29, 1938. It was the first international meeting on rotary-wing aircraft and marked a turning point from autogyros to helicopters. It was from this event that the American helicopter industry was born. The American Helicopter Society (AHS) – as the Society was originally known – was founded less than five years later.

This historic gathering was noted at the time as "the first free discussion in this field of science open to all engineers in the aircraft industry." The conference was preceded the evening before, on October 27, 1938, with a lecture on "Principles of Rotary Aircraft" by the esteemed Dr. Alexander Klemin, then professor of the Daniel Guggenheim School of Aeronautics at New York University. The conference was chaired by Ralph McClarren, the Franklin Institute's Assistant Associate Director of Aviation, who kicked off the meeting with a review of rotating wing aircraft. Papers were then presented on the development and improvement of autogyros, helicopter and convertaplanes, their application and uses, as well as on research facilities and programs. The other members of the organizing committee were Agnew Larsen, Laurence LePage, Richard Prewitt and James Ray.

All of these individuals were luminaries in the then-moribund field of autogyro research and development. But also attending the conference were several who would become pillars of the then-nascent helicopter field, including Igor I. Sikorsky, Michael Gluhareff, Raoul Hafner, then-Lt. H. Franklin Gregory and W. Laurence LePage. Although they could not attend, papers by Germany's Henrich Focke and France's Louis Bréguet were presented by Hafner, one of the pioneers of British rotorcraft, who noted that the Rotating Wing Meeting was held in Philadelphia because "this is the town in which practically all the rotary-wing activity in the United States takes place."

The ceremony on October 27, 2013 will be held in the Aviation Hall as part of a half-day of 75th anniversary celebrations. The Vertical Flight Heritage Site recognition ceremony will feature remarks by the Executive Director of AHS International Mike Hirschberg and Franklin Institute President and CEO Dennis M. Wint. The event is preceded by a half day of technical sessions discussing the past, present and future of rotary wing flight – mirroring the original 1938 event – and followed by a Gala Banquet in Franklin Hall that is a fundraiser for the American Helicopter Museum & Education Center. Go to www.vtol.org/first for more information.

AHS International plans to continue to recognize important historical sites as part of its Vertical Flight Heritage Sites Program. The purpose of the program is to recognize and preserve sites of the most noteworthy and significant contributions made in both the theory and practice of helicopter and other VTOL aircraft technology. More information is available at www.vtol.org/heritage.

The American Helicopter Society (AHS) International is the world's premier vertical flight technical society. Since its inception in 1943, AHS has been a major force in the advancement of vertical flight. The Society is the global resource for information on vertical flight technology. It provides global leadership for scientific, technical, educational and legislative initiatives that advance the state-of-the-art of vertical flight.

A pdf version of this press release is also available.

AHS International - The Vertical Flight Technical Society

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