



Vertical Flight Heritage Site

Pioneering Vertical Flight in America Hammondsport, New York, 1908

Between January and May 1908, John Newton Williams, demonstrated rotary wing test rigs at this site, known as Kingsley Flats, marking one of the first significant efforts to develop a helicopter in the United States. Powered by an engine designed and built by Glenn Hammond Curtiss, and hosted by Alexander Graham Bell's Aerial Experiment Association, Williams succeeded in lifting the platform off the ground with Byron Brown aboard.

2017



Vertical Flight Heritage Site Dedication Ceremony



Kingsley Flats Hammondsport, New York

July 6, 2019

Vertical Flight Heritage Site

Officiating

Benjamin Johnson, Executive Director, Glenn H. Curtiss Museum
Mike Hirschberg, Executive Director, The Vertical Flight Society

Background

The Vertical Flight Society — founded in 1943 as the American Helicopter Society — is the world's oldest and largest society dedicated to advancing vertical flight technology. The Society's Vertical Flight Heritage Sites Program recognizes and helps preserve the important vertical flight historical sites around the world.

The Glenn H. Curtiss Museum, bearing the name of Hammondsport's favorite son, is dedicated to the memory of pioneer aviator, Glenn Curtiss. Curtiss began his career as a builder of bicycles and then, motorcycles. In 1907, he became the “fastest man on earth” when he attained a speed of 136.4 MPH on his V8-powered motorcycle. On July 4, 1908, Curtiss gained notoriety of a different kind when he flew his flying machine, named the “June Bug,” a distance of over 5,000 ft to win the Scientific American Trophy. This was the first pre-announced, public flight in America — a feat that earned him pilot's license #1. After faster and faster aircraft and motorcycles, he began producing seaplanes. Today, he is acknowledged as “The Father of Naval Aviation” and is a progenitor of Curtiss-Wright Corporation.

In between these incredible accomplishments, Curtiss and the Aerial Experiment Association succeeded in demonstrating the first machine to lift itself vertically off the ground, the so-called “Williams Helicopter,” in May 1908.

This spot is the 7th named location to be recognized as a Vertical Flight Heritage Site since the program was initiated in 2013.

www.vtol.org/heritage
www.curtissmuseum.org

The Williams Helicopter at Kingsley Flats

In January 1908, John Newton Williams arrived in Hammondsport, New York, with his experimental “helicopter” at the invitation of Glenn H. Curtiss.

Members of Alexander Graham Bell's Aerial Experiment Association were already busy with their first airplane, the Red Wing, but Curtiss had offered the use of his V-8 engine to Williams and the A.E.A. immediately became involved in the testing of his helicopter. The Williams helicopter was a simple coaxial design consisting of two superimposed two-bladed rotors on concentric shafts rotating in opposite directions. Williams would make several trial attempts at flight from January through May in the test area known as “Kingsley Flats.” The testing depended upon the availability of the Curtiss V-8 engine which was also being used in the Red Wing, the White Wing and then finally the June Bug. Finally, on May 22, 1908, a photo taken by Curtiss states, “Lifted this young man (Byron Brown), several inches, several times. Trials witnessed by Alexander Graham Bell, Lieut. Selfridge, Augustus Post and others (A.E.A.)” This event would mark the first vertical liftoff of a person in the United States — reportedly as high as three feet on a tethered hover.

Kingsley Flats was also the site of extensive dirigible testing. Of particular note was the Baldwin Dirigible, the California Arrow, which Curtiss first flew on June 28, 1907, starting his remarkable career in aviation. Much of the testing at Kingsley Flats (including the Williams Helicopter) was housed in the first private aerodrome in America. Constructed in 1906, it was a large wooden building measuring 40 feet x 75 feet x 27 feet high and known as “The Hangar” by the large crowds who frequented the flats.