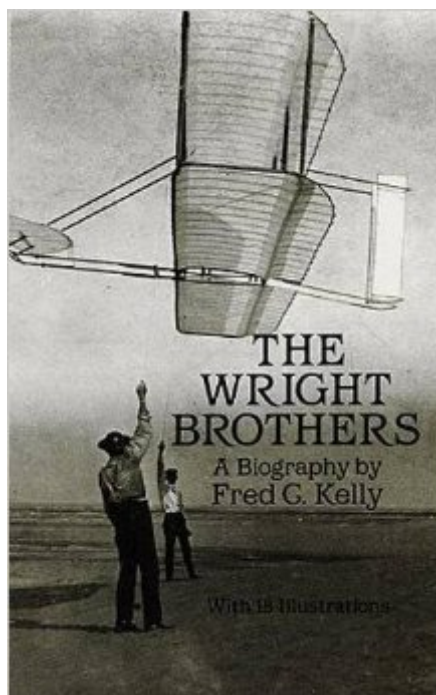


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The Wright Brothers: A Biography (Dover Transportation)



Synopsis

In this fascinating, highly readable biography, Fred C. Kelly, a former newspaperman, author, and an old friend of the Wrights, tells the story of the two brilliant, dedicated, flight-obsessed bicycle mechanics from Ohio who first realized mankind's age-old dream of conquering the skies. Long considered the definitive Wright biography (the manuscript was read and approved by Orville Wright), this book recounts the Wrights' small-town boyhood, their early interest in all things mechanical, the establishment of the Wright Cycle Shop, and the complete behind-the-scenes story of how they designed, built, tested, and flew (December 1903) the first "Flyer." Enhanced with sixteen rare photographs, Mr. Kelly's engaging account avoids minute technical description, yet describes simply and clearly the technological innovations that enabled the two brothers to succeed where so many others had failed. Anyone interested in the mechanics of flight or early aviation will find this volume a splendid introduction to the Wright brothers and their epochal achievement.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Kelly wrote the "official" story, as "authorized" and sanitized by Orville Wright, of the brothers' Wright. As a devotee of the Wrights, it is unfortunate that Kelly filled his book with deficiencies and erroneous claims made on Orville's behalf. A careful reading of the entire Wright papers and material still unpublished, reveals that Wilbur was the "brains" behind the discovery of flight; it was

Orville who added his mechanical expertise in the building of the flyer. It is so unfortunate that so much that continues to be written about the Wrights is merely a reshuffling of old facts and surmises, with the result of a perpetuation of errors and distortions. It was John R. McMahon who told the real story based on his revision of an original manuscript by Earl Findley. Orville had turned to Findley to write the biography; but it was too near the truth; too personal; and he nixed it. But the truth came out, when McMahon wrote a series of articles on the Wright Brothers in "Popular Science," January 1929. When he came to write his book, still based on the Findley manuscript, Orville protested and was able to get several passages, on threat of court action, changed in the book. For example, Orville didn't want the years Wilbur spent at home as an invalid, revealed. Orville also has himself elevated above Wilbur, as the creative driving force in the airplane's invention. If you want to investigate the real story, take the Kelly book with a grain of salt, and read instead, John Evangelist Walsh' "One Day at Kitty Hawk," published by Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1975. Even better, wouldn't it be good to have the unpublished Findley manuscript published, instead of suppressed.

Fred Kelly has written the definitive biography of the Wright Brothers, with special emphasis on the 10 years after the first flight. During this time, the brothers worked diligently to explain the benefits of aviation to an unbelieving public and uninterested leaders of military and commercial concerns. Kelly starts at the beginning, with tales of the brothers as young children and schoolboys, ultimately moving into the world of commerce as circus impresarios, printers, and bicycle builders and repairmen. By the late 1890's they had selected aviation as a hobby, and started their annual pilgrimages to Kitty Hawk for several months each year to perform experiments. Only after 4 or 5 years of gliding and kite flying, was manned flight considered. By working long hours in the bicycle shop and minimizing all expenses, they were able to pursue this unusual hobby for several weeks each fall. The obstacles were legendary, but the brothers persevered, usually by arguing (in a friendly way) between themselves, then reading every book on the subject in the Dayton public library, and then, developing new theories and experimental methods. In this way, they broke new ground in fluid dynamics, control and stability, motor construction, and propeller design. For example, they discovered that published tables of data on wind dynamics were wrong, so they built a wind tunnel to generate better data. The brothers had a unique ability to solve problems by applying a sound scientific approach and by going about it in an honest midwestern approach. Those of us who were at the centennial did not hear the story of how little publicity the 1903 flight received.

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