

College Park Aviation Museum

Firsts of firsts in aviation.



written by: Judy Colbert

The **College Park Aviation Museum** is a wonderful exploration of aviation history that teaches and entertains without overwhelming the visitor. Why have an aviation museum here? Easy. Because the adjacent airport is the oldest continuously operating airport in the world! Yes, the world!

Known as the “Field of Firsts,” the first female passenger in America took flight here. The first controlled helicopter flight happened here. The Wright Brothers flew here. Corporal Frank Scott (see the address of the museum) was the first enlisted man to die in an air accident (he was a passenger), on September 28, 1912, here at this airport. Scott Air Force Base near Belleville, Illinois is named after him.

And, the first flight of the nascent airmail system was flown out of here on its way to Philadelphia and then to New York. That happened 100 years ago on August 12, 1918. The museum is celebrating the 100th anniversary of airmail service with a special display, “Delivering America: Airmail to Email” that’s available at least through August 2019.

The Curtiss JN-4D “Jenny” Military Tractor, beautifully restored (minus an engine) is on display at the museum. It had a range of 175 miles. Imagine yourself heading into the wild blue, along with the mail, in that little thing. No bathroom, no flight attendants, not much of anything, really.

With a history like that, you can understand the museum’s mission is dedicated to preserving and promoting aviation innovations at the airport and in Prince George’s County.

The 27,000-square-foot museum opened in 1998, is affiliated with the Smithsonian Institution, has historic and reproduction aircraft associated with the history of the airfield. There are 10 full-size aircraft with a focus on aviation “firsts” that happened at this airport. These include a 1910 Wright Model B reproduction, a 1911 Curtiss Model D reproduction, a 1912 Bierlot XI reproduction, a 1924 Berliner Helicopter No. 5, a 1932 Monocoupe 110, a 1936 Taylor J-2 “Cub”, a 1939 Taylorcraft BL-65, a 1941 Boeing A75N1/PT-17 “Stearman,” a 1946 Ercoupe 415D, and the above-mentioned Jenny.

Exhibits change regularly, so there's always something new to see. There's a special interactive area for little pilots inside the museum and a couple of airplanes on springs outdoors, near picnic tables (there's no food service at the museum).

Additionally, there's a delightful gift shop with things aeronautic and otherwise, a research library, a meeting room, and a facility for birthday parties.

If you're a veteran of the U.S. military service with a story to tell, you can record them here as part of the Veterans History Project. Interviews generally take about 45 minutes and a finished copy will be sent to you. Call the museum to schedule your interview.

The airport has an observation deck to watch planes taking off and landing.