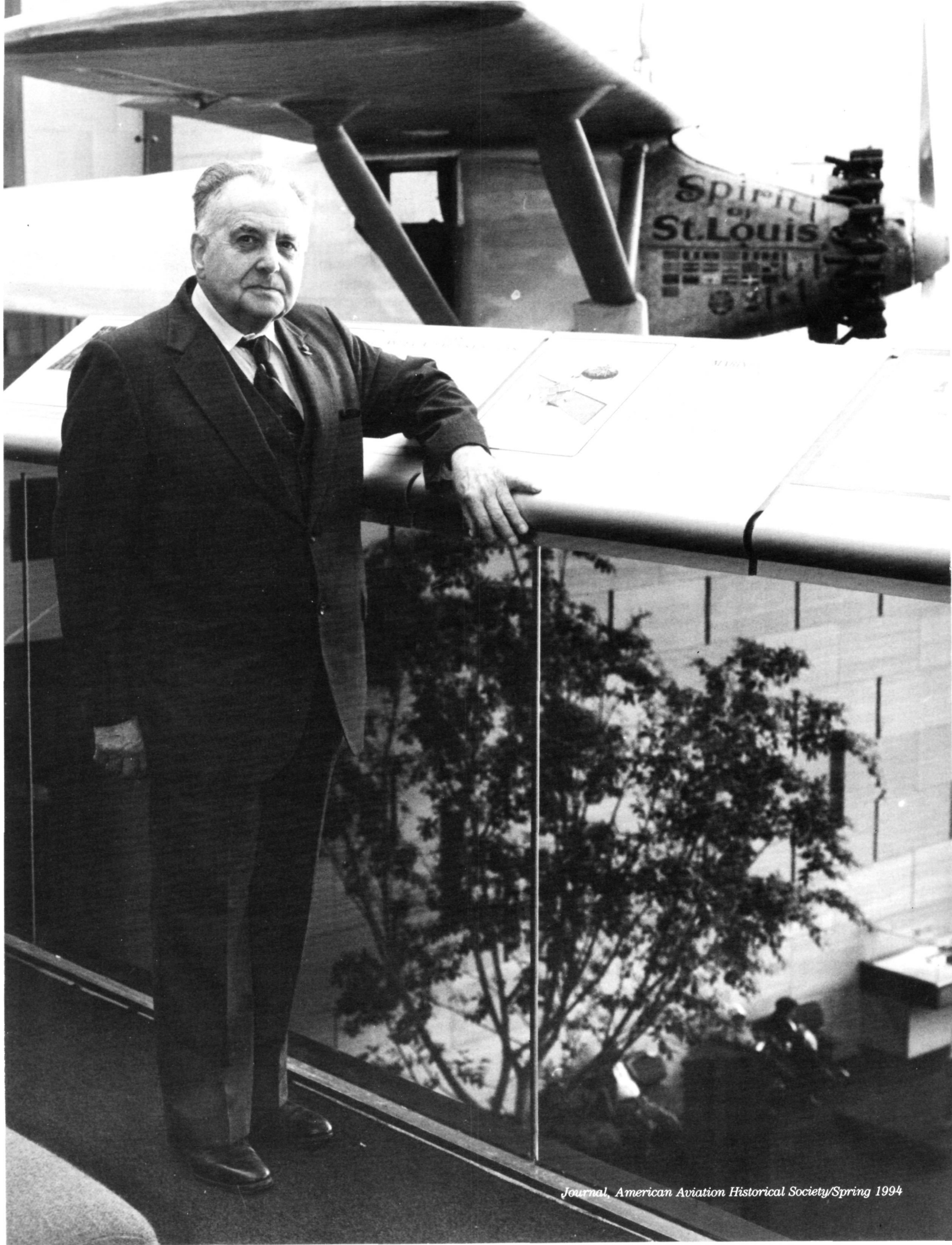




REMEMBERING PAUL E. GARBER

FATHER OF THE NATIONAL AERONAUTICAL COLLECTION

by Robert C. Mikesch

IMAGINE VISITING THE NATIONAL AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM and not seeing the *Spirit of St. Louis* or the *Wright Flyer*. Also lacking could be the first airplane to fly across America, and the first one to make it nonstop. Then there is the *Chicago*, one of two to be first to fly around the world; the NC-4, first to cross the Atlantic Ocean. The historic B-17D *Swoose*, and many Allied and former enemy aircraft of World War II along with important civil craft would be lacking from the collection.

The list could go on and on, recounting many historic aircraft that if it had not been for one man in the right job at the right time, all these milestones of our nation's aviation heritage would have disappeared. That one person was Paul E. Garber, for many years the figurehead for aviation at the Smithsonian Institution, National Air Museum, later renamed the National Air and Space Museum (NASM) in Washington, D.C. It is remarkable when considering that here was a man that in his youth at age 10 saw the Wright Brothers fly at Ft. Myer, Virginia, in 1910, a time that man-carrying controlled flight was at its beginning. By the time of his death on September 23, 1992, at age 93, he witnessed the development of aviation from that beginning to seeing commercial airlines connecting people with two continents in a few hours, manned flight reaching speeds 6.7 times the speed of sound (X-15), man walking on the face of the moon, and an SR-71 crossing this vast country in one hour plus eight minutes. This occurred on that airplane's delivery flight to the museum March 6, 1990.

Anyone in the presence of Paul Garber listening to him recounting these events within his lifetime recognized a man who truly lived the history of manned flight. He often commented that "We are yet in the infancy of flight, both within our earth's atmosphere as well as in outer space." The point that he was making in terms of a museum approach to aviation history was that it is far too soon to judge any object for its future value in the eyes of today. It can only be with gener-

ations to come that through the passing of time will have a truer perspective of today's objects and their importance or lack thereof.

Applying this concept, Garber was willing and anxious throughout his life to gather anything the least bit significant that had something to do with aviation. From this evolved the most visited museum in all the world, the National Air and Space Museum.

Garber's ability to recognize significance in things aeronautical did not happen by chance. He was an eager student throughout his avocation from early childhood. Born August 31, 1899, in Atlantic City, N.J., it took only five years before he was on the beach holding the string of a kite. The flight of birds and kites were always a fascination to him.

One story that Paul Garber always liked to tell took place after his family moved to Washington, D.C., and resided on Connecticut Avenue. One day he was having difficulty in getting his kite to fly as it should. A kindly gentleman passing by stopped and informed him that "It isn't bridled properly." He cut the bridle off from the front of the kite, re-attached the ends to selected points, stepped out into the middle of the street and held the kite up above his head. The man nodded to Garber, who jerked the kite line and the kite rose beautifully. Garber was patted encouragingly on the head by the man who then went on his way. This neighbor was Dr. Alexander Graham Bell, remembered best for being the inventor of the telephone, but also an enthusiastic and capable designer, maker, and flyer of kites.

Like most boys of that time, Garber developed an interest in building and flying model airplanes. In 1913 he founded the Capital Model Aero Club in Washington, which consisted of periodic meetings for discussing developments in this new hobby, and visiting airfields at Benning and College Park, sharing the sheer joy of seeing aircraft fly. This brought about a large following, eager to experiment, learn, and fly their own "twin pushers" which were the most popular design in those days. These efforts by Garber introduced many young men to aviation as did his monthly article in a boys' magazine telling about model building.

By 1915, Garber built and piloted a hang glider based on a

Among aviation notables throughout the world is Paul E. Garber, a man who dedicated his life to acquiring and preserving aviation history and gathering associated objects. His 73 years' continual service to the National Air and Space Museum will be long remembered. (S.I. 81-16950-26)



scale model of an early Chanute glider he had seen on exhibit at the Smithsonian. This eventually made him eligible for membership in an exclusive club, the Early Birds of Aviation, an organization of pilots who soloed prior to December 17, 1916.

Garber joined the D.C. National Guard during World War I, transferred to the Army, and emerged as a sergeant at war's end. During his short service, he received some "unofficial" ground and flight instruction, which further stimulated his interest in airplanes, and made him even more determined to pursue some kind of career in aviation. The Postal Air Mail Service looked promising in 1919, and he joined the service as a ground crewman at College Park, Maryland. It was only a matter of months before that station closed, and the young Garber was once again looking for a job.

Fortunately for many of us, Garber obtained employment at the Smithsonian Institution in 1920, early enough to influence the museum to recognize significant aviation objects, and better still, to acquire them. He was 20 years old at the time he was hired only temporarily for the summer months as an Exhibits Preparator with the Division of Mechanical Technology. For Garber, this was not just a job, but the fulfillment of a burning desire to work with the technical objects that he would often look at during his frequent visits to the museum.

Between times of dusting and repairing the exhibits, he handcrafted a model of Leonardo da Vinci's concept of an aircraft as he envisioned it in the 1490s. He felt that the presence of such a model in the Institution was necessary in showing the development of manned flight. Garber wanted

to leave something of himself behind that would add to the meager exhibit on aviation at that time.

On his final day of work while hanging the model in one of the galleries, a stately gentleman asked what he was doing. Garber proceeded to tell him the significance of this da Vinci model and why it was appropriate to the museum. The man seemed satisfied with the answers to his questions and soon disappeared. In a few minutes the museum's chief clerk appeared and said in an authoritative voice to the young Exhibits Preparator, "Garber, you have been hired." He soon found out that the person he had been talking to and who was so impressed by Garber's knowledge of aviation was Dr. Walcott, then the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution.

In the years that followed, Garber made it his business to pay special attention to the few items in the museum that pertained to aeronautics. In the meantime, he continued repairing sewing machines used for demonstrations, building and repairing models, dusting exhibit machinery, and the many other things so essential to museum housekeeping. Except for the display of Chinese kites, and a few airplanes hanging in the galleries, Garber's avid exposure to aviation continued with building model airplanes at home, along with his association with model airplane clubs. Through this he continued to learn more and more about aviation and its technology.

The years of 1927 and 1928 brought about major changes within the Smithsonian Institution. According to Garber, this was a direct result of the flight of Lindbergh. It brought about for the first time the distinct subject of aviation. It was to the Smithsonian Institution that the public turned for

Garber was keenly aware of the planned crossing of the Atlantic in 1927 by various aircraft through frequent mention in the newspapers of people who were planning to make this nonstop flight. Young Garber knew of Lindbergh as an air-mail pilot through his association with a friend who lived in St. Louis. When he learned from his radio at home, which he had made, that Lindbergh had taken off, he approached the Secretary, Dr. Abbot, with encouragement for him to ask Lindbergh for his airplane. Garber told his story in these words.

"I had another half hour or so all steamed up. But about that time, he (Abbot) sort of slowed me down . . . but nevertheless he realized that I felt that this was important, and he interrupted me to say, 'Well now, Garber, he hasn't gotten there yet. He is only up around New England so far, and what makes you think he will accomplish that flight all the way, as he will probably be drowned about midway in the Atlantic.' As I tried to further support my cause, he said, 'We'll see, and with this his chin sort of went down and his eyes sort of rolled over toward the door, then looked toward me—so that was my exit.

That cablegram reads as follows:

Washington DC
May 27, 1927
Captain Charles A. Lindbergh
American Embassy, Paris
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION CONGRATULATES
YOU ON GLORIOUS ACHIEVEMENT STOP HOPE
SPIRIT OF ST LOUIS WILL EVENTUALLY JOIN
LANGLEY'S MACHINES, THE ARMY WRIGHT
FIRST PLANE EVER OWNED BY ANY GOVERN-
MENT, THE NC-4, CHICAGO, AND OTHER
HISTORIC AMERICAN PLANES IN OUR UNITED
STATES NATIONAL MUSEUM STOP
C.G. ABBOT
ACTING SECRETARY
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION



Paul Garber had a fondness for model aircraft, not only experiencing the Joy in building them, but recognizing their importance for illustrating actual aircraft for the museum visitor when the real example was not available or too large. Circa 1924. (S.I. 92-6815)

After Lindbergh piloted the *Spirit of St. Louis* more than 42,000 miles, he acceded to this request and flew it from St. Louis to Bolling Field in the nation's capital on April 30, 1928. There, the wing was removed and the airplane towed from Bolling to the east door of the Arts and Industries Building where it entered, was reassembled, and placed on display on May 13, 1928.

Some of these aircraft were offered to the Smithsonian.



others had to be asked for. It was Garber who recognized historic items of aviation and for those not offered set about to acquire them. Each of these airplanes had its own unique story behind it. What is even more interesting, aside from the aircraft itself, is that Garber was the only person at the Smithsonian who really cared at that time—the *only person*. Fortunately, his convictions generally received an approving nod from his superiors at the museum. It was small enough in staff at that time, that by going directly to the Secretary, who obviously had confidence in his judgment, he was fairly free to pursue his goals.

During the years of World War II, Garber left the museum and served as an officer in the U.S. Navy for five years. Here again, his experience with model airplanes made a contribution to the war effort. At the Smithsonian, he had created an exhibit with models, showing many of the combat airplanes in the world at that time. Recalling this, the director of Navy training called upon Garber to be part of the aircraft recognition program and gave him a direct commission as Lieutenant. He was a key figure in the aircraft recognition model program that developed for the military services and used by volunteer civilian spotters. This method of training with I.D. models prevailed to the early 1960s and is today the focus of avid collectors of these miniatures.

Among other contributions was one developed from his wartime service aboard the Jeep carrier USS *Block Island*. Garber designed training devices in the form of controllable kites. These were used for ship-to-air gunnery practice, which

were patented by the Navy in Garber's name.

Following the war, Garber remained in uniform an additional year to help write a history of Naval aviation. It was at this time, after acquiring the rank of Commander, that Garber saw the need for his help back at the museum and returned to his post as curator. The collection of aircraft for the Smithsonian was about to grow in unheard-of proportions.

Due in large part to the foresight of General of the Army Air Corps H.H. "Hap" Arnold (later General of the Air Force), he had directed that one of each military type aircraft, both U.S. as well as foreign, be collected and retained for educational purposes. Obviously the military was not to be in the museum business of this magnitude, so a National Air Museum seemed to be the appropriate solution. At that time, a mere handful of aeronautical collections used the term "air museum," for such interest was yet to develop.

The forming of such a museum as a separate bureau of the Smithsonian Institution came about with the signing of the bill into law by President Truman on August 12, 1946. The museum was established, and Garber was appointed as its first curator. But its staff was a mere half dozen and there was nowhere to place this collection of nearly 200 military aircraft along with an assortment of civil craft plus thousands of related equipment. With the aid of a few new employees and military servicemen, accountability of the collection was accepted while it resided at Park Ridge, Illinois, now the site of Chicago O'Hare International Airport. Garber was in charge of this tremendous task of accounting for planes and



Ceremonies held on the 45th anniversary of the first flight, December 17, 1948, celebrates the exhibit of the *Kitty Hawk Flyer* suspended in the main gallery of the Arts and Industries Building of the Smithsonian Institution. The *Spirit of St. Louis* shares this position. (S.I. A-38397G)

A disagreement with the Smithsonian Institution was cause for the *Kitty Hawk Flyer* to be exhibited in London for many years. An agreement was finally reached to return the airplane to the United States for exhibit, a verdict for which Garber was influential. Garber, second from left, accompanied the airplane on its final segment to Washington, D.C. (S.I. 38650-C)

During World War II, Garber served five years in the U.S. Navy. He was instrumental in developing air technical training devices such as this controllable kite for ship-to-air gunnery practice which the Navy patented in his name. (S.I. A-44046-A)



equipment at this distant location.

But the Smithsonian did not wish to separate its holdings that far from Washington, particularly one that seemed to some at the Smithsonian as being unmanageable and to others, unwanted. The Korean War almost resolved this issue. With very short notice, the National Air Museum was ordered to vacate the storage area in Chicago in a matter of days. This was an impossible task, particularly in having no place to go. The next step could have been catastrophic.

Garber was not told to solve this problem, but instead stepped forward and asked if he could manage the problem for the Smithsonian. He sensed what might otherwise happen, i.e., be ordered to select a few aircraft and scrap the rest. As it was, many were scrapped by vote of a committee with limited knowledge or foresight of the subject, leaving 97 aircraft along with engines and equipment to be retained for the museum.

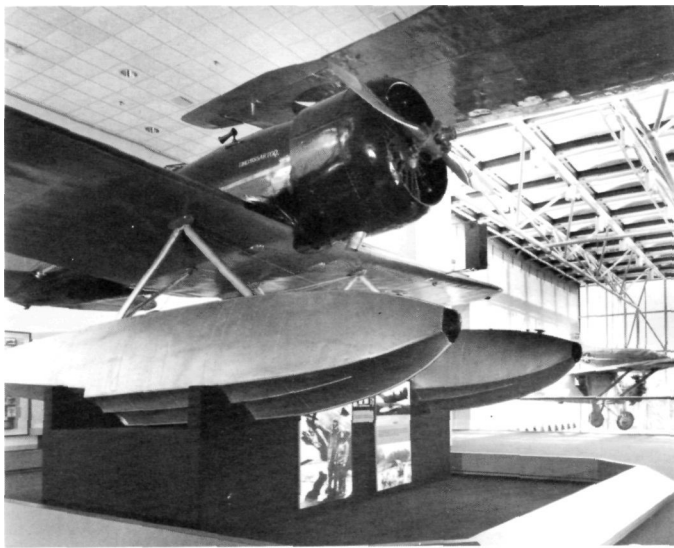
To find a new home for the remainder, Garber made a search of government-owned property between Chicago and Washington, D.C. He selected a site at Silver Hill, near Suitland, Maryland. With the cooperation of the local bases and posts of the Army, Navy and Air Force, since limited or no funds were available, the grounds were cleared and temporary buildings were constructed. Under his constant supervision, mostly from Washington, Garber was able to move the remains of this valued collection to its new home. His tenacity in saving what he could was a personal challenge and in the best interest of the museum. After two labor-intensive

years of packing, crating, shipping, the move to Washington was completed in 1952.

In the meantime, soon after the establishment of the National Air Museum in 1947, Garber focused his attention on the original *Wright Flyer*. Because of a dispute between the Wrights and the Smithsonian in its rightful recognition of this airplane being the first powered and controllable aircraft, the Wrights had sent the airplane to London in 1928 where it was on loan to a British museum. Garber was able to persuade Smithsonian officials that the *Flyer* should take its rightful place in the National Air Museum in the United States.

Agreements between the Wrights and the two museums were reached and the airplane was packed in three crates for its return to America in 1948. The trip was not an easy one. Because of a dock strike in New York, the crates were off loaded in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Garber received the shocking word while waiting at the customs office in New York. Without delay he booked the next flight to Halifax, where he located the three precious crates at dockside.

Recognizing the problems of transporting these crates from distant Halifax, he telephoned one of his former commanding officers, Admiral Mel Pride in Washington. "Sir, can you send a ship to me in Halifax," was the story Garber often told. "Good God, Garber, you think of the damndest things," was the Admiral's initial reply. After due deliberation, Admiral Pride informed Garber that a ship would be diverted for the pickup. From morning to dark, everyday, the lightly clothed Garber, prepared for only one day in New



Garber eventually obtained from Charles and Ann Lindbergh their Lockheed Sirius, the airplane in which they explored the air route to the Orient and performed rescue missions over flood waters in 1931 while in China. This airplane rests on exhibit with the *Spirit of St. Louis* in the background in the National Air and Space Museum. (Mikesh)

Having been a Naval officer, it was natural that Garber had an intense love for Naval aircraft. Among the many postwar acquisitions of military aircraft was this Sikorsky JRS-1, now in storage and awaiting restoration. (S.I. 84-5332-9)

Garber foresaw the historic significance of aircraft while they were still in operational service. This example is the Loening Amphibian, San Francisco, which served as lead aircraft for a goodwill flight through Central and South America in 1927. It is shown here during one of its reoccurring exhibits in the Arts and Industries Building. (A-1694-C)



York, sat shivering on the Canadian wharf that November guarding his treasure and watching for the Navy ship.

The Navy not only sent a ship, but fittingly enough an aircraft carrier. As it entered the Canadian harbor, the port came to life with ships' horns and whistles, all sounding off in what seemed to be a salute. Garber thanked a Canadian official for the welcome for the ship that would transport this historic aircraft to his home only to be told, "Sorry, but we're celebrating the announcement of the birth of Charles, Prince of Wales."

In the years that followed, Garber continued to collect historic and technologically significant aircraft. As the museum staff grew, he advanced in position to that of Head Curator and Senior Historian. For the position of Director, he was always the bridesmaid but never the bride. Instead, he seemed content to have the position of Curator in order to watch over the collection more closely.

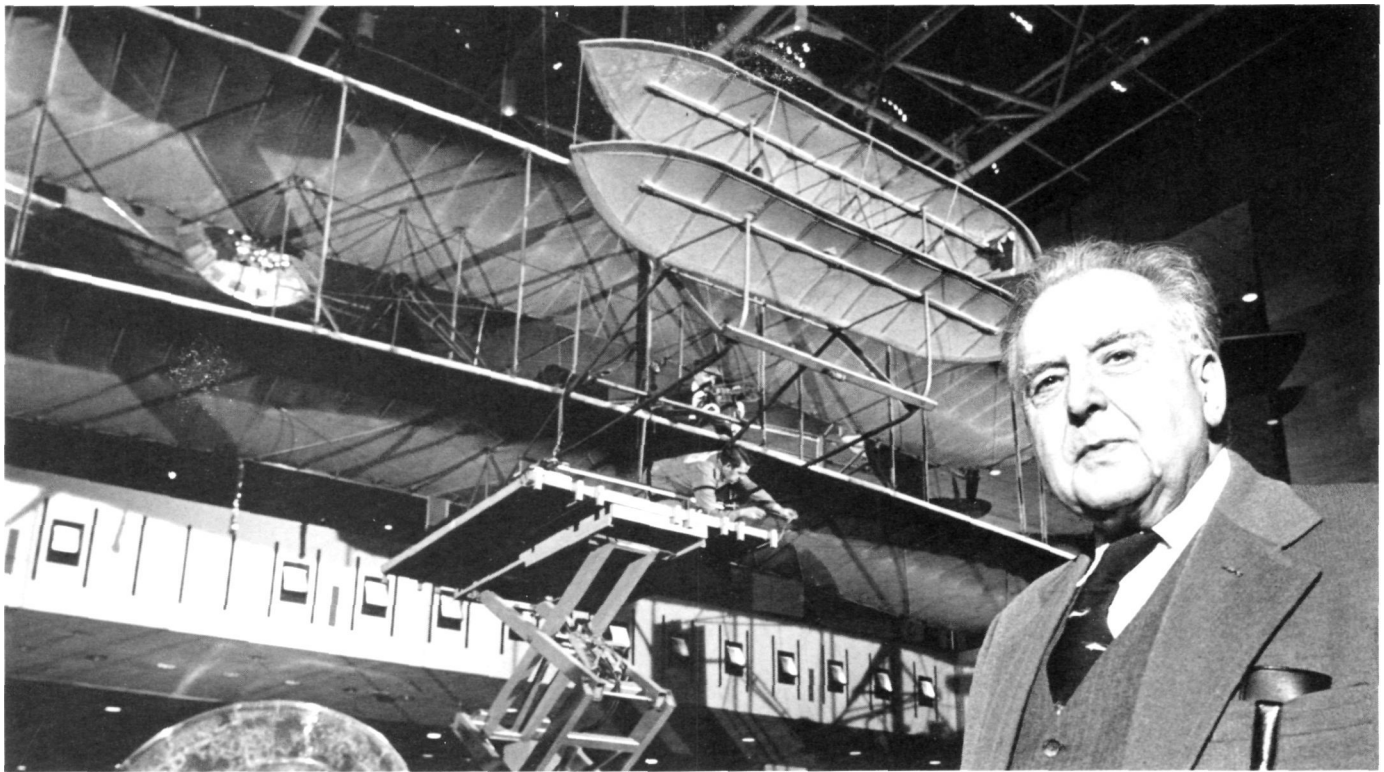
Reaching the mandatory retirement age of 70 in 1969, he remained at the museum as Historian Emeritus in the privately funded position as Ramsey Fellow. This gave Navy representation to the museum staff.

When Congress granted appropriations for the present building of the National Air and Space Museum on the Washington Mall, Paul Garber saw his dreams come true. The building opened to the public on July 1, 1976. The new museum was an instant success, reaching 10 or more million visitors a year several times.

The staff at the museum always recognized Garber's birthday in some fashion. On his 80th birthday in 1980 his name was assigned to the storage facility at Silver Hill as the Paul E. Garber Preservation Restoration and Storage Facility. What a fitting tribute to this man who not only founded and established this facility, but lived an additional 13 years to realize that his efforts were appreciated. This is a place where part of the Garber legacy of over 160 aircraft as well as numerous spacecraft, engines, propellers and other flight-related objects can be viewed by an enthusiastic public.

Among the many honors paid to him in recognition of his outstanding service was being the recipient of honorary doctoral degrees from the University of Dayton, Ohio, and from Salem College, West Virginia. He was the recipient of the Smithsonian's Gold Medal for Exceptional Service which cites his lifelong dedication to aviation as a flyer, historian, collector, conservator and educator. Paul Garber became Honorary Naval Aviator No. 16, joining such illustrious company as Admiral Arleigh Burke, Lt. Gen. James Doolittle, and Vice Admiral Hyman Rickover.





Paul Garber is shown here in 1985 alongside his greatest prize aircraft, the *Wright Flyer*. It resides in the building of his fondest dreams, a building exclusively built as the National Air and Space Museum which opened to the public in July 1976.

Although able to fully retire, seemingly with all his ambitions fulfilled, the museum was Paul Garber's life. To have left the museum would obviously be life threatening. At the museum he continued to see an endless flow of visitors, frequently interrupted by countless telephone calls. His presence was a necessity. He made every effort to answer every letter addressed to him, some quite delayed, but the contents of each were worth waiting for. Each seemed to contain some facet of aviation history that collectively must tell the complete story of aviation through the eyes of this man who had seen it all.

His office walls lined with commemorative plaques and citations awarded him, Paul Garber always had a welcome smile for any visitor who entered his door. Many visitors improvised questions merely for the opportunity to meet this noted aviation collector and historian. (S.I. 91-6137-3)

Good health remained with Paul Garber through these concluding years for which he often remarked how blessed he was. This allowed him to continue with his work. Now alone, for his beloved wife Irene Tusch Garber, "Buttons," passed away in 1986, he moved to a Navy retirement community in 1990. In 1992, at age 93, his legs, aggravated by a war injury, kept him to his room more often than at the museum. After a few months, his health gave out and the aviation community lost a dear friend. His ashes were placed in Arlington National Cemetery along with those of his wife.

In celebration of his 90th birthday with friends at the museum, Paul Garber received a congratulatory letter from President George Bush which summed up the life of this aviation notable:

During your lifetime, man's greatest dream of flying has become an everyday occurrence. During the past nine decades, men and women in aviation have woven an epic saga of flight that has captured the imagination of the world. These pioneers took to the air in machines that we now view with awe as the most tangible legacy of their achievements. You have helped to preserve that great legacy for future generations by building the Smithsonian's collection of historic aircraft, and all of us are infinitely richer for your efforts. •

