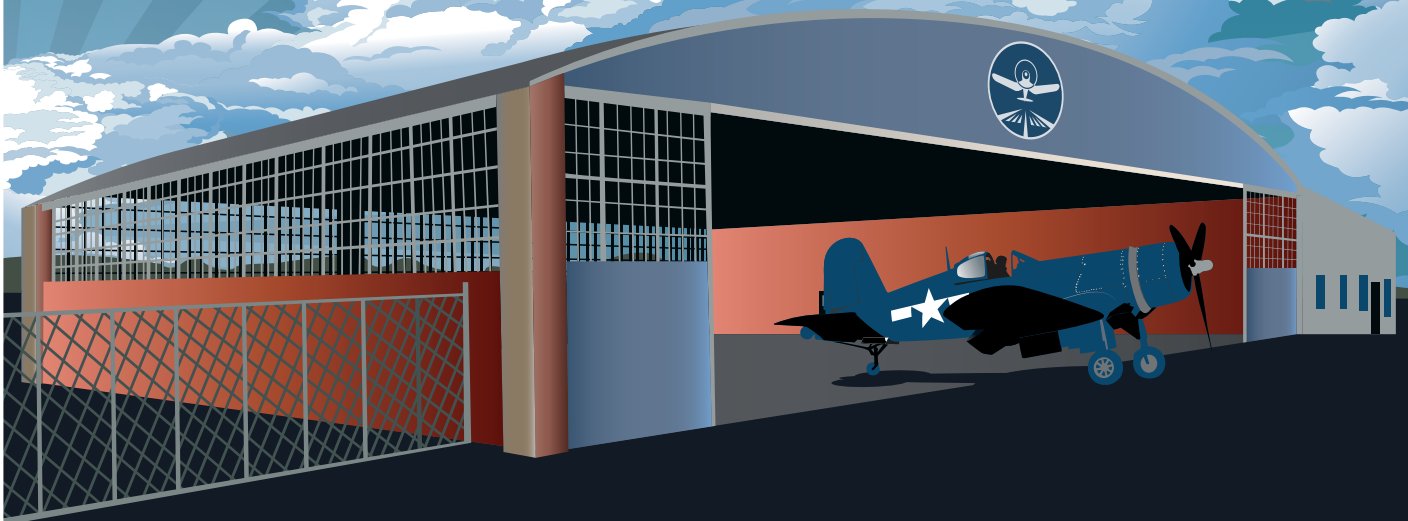


HONOR - PRESERVE - EDUCATE



HISTORIC

Curtiss

HANGAR
RESTORATION

STRATFORD - CONNECTICUT

Introduction:

Travelling along the ample coastline of **Connecticut**, you might come across the modest **Sikorsky Memorial Airport** in **Stratford**. It is there that a piece of aviation history still stands to this day. Known locally as the: **Curtiss Hangar**, this historic structure has stood the test of time in a stubborn defiance, echoing back to an era known as the **Golden Age of Aviation**. When aviators in silk scarfs climbed into radial engined biplanes, and soared high over the state and **Long Island Sound**. Where many people might see a crumbling façade and torn roof, the **501(c)3** non-profit organization: the **Connecticut Air & Space Center** saw an amazing opportunity. A chance to preserve the past and create a destination for people to come and learn about this most important history. But not without your help.

Working with state, local, and public departments, the **Connecticut Air & Space Center**, has been dedicated to restoring this vintage **Curtiss Hangar** back to its original condition so that it can be used to house the museum's growing collection of vintage aircraft and exhibits to share with everyone.



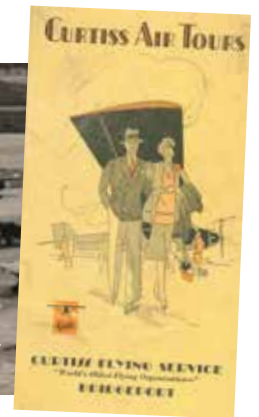
Photo by: Sam Kent

History - Beginnings:

The airport's origins go back a lot further than most people may realize. Local aviation pioneer **Gustave Whitehead** (who is believed to have designed, built, and flown his own aeroplane in 1901 in **Fairfield**) reportedly made several test flights in and around **Lordship** and where the present airport is today. The property that would eventually become the airfield was originally a racetrack known as **Avon Field**, where early aircraft would land on the grass infield. It was also the site of Connecticut's first airshow being held in 1911, on the grounds of what is now **St. Michaels Cemetery**. The **Military Manuvers of 1912** in **Stratford** also saw the first use of aircraft by the military in the state.



Image of the Curtiss Hangar circa 1930's ▲
Curtiss Flying Service Brochure ►



In 1928 plans were made to build four permanent buildings on-site for the airfield. The **Curtiss Flying Service** built two hangars to promote their aviation mechanic and flying school. A former farmhouse was re-purposed as the airport manager's house. Known better today as the **Windsock Bar & Grill**. The newly minted **Bridgeport Airport** opened for flying operations on **November 11, 1928** with an official dedication ceremony held on **July 5-6, 1929**. A few years later **North-Eastern Airlines** began passenger service from the state's first airport terminal that was in-between the two hangars.

The year 1929 also saw the arrival of the airport's most notable tenant and future namesake: **Igor Sikorsky**. Moving from **Long Island** to **Stratford**, **Sikorsky** took advantage of the deep waters of the **Housatonic River** to continue building flying boats. The original portion of the **Sikorsky** factory was also built in 1929 and saw the production of flying boats started with many other designs on the way.



History - The Golden Age:

In 1933 the airport was renamed: **Mollison Field**, in honor of Captain **Jim Mollison** who had crash landed there during an attempt to fly across the **Atlantic** with his wife, famous aviatrix **Amy Johnson** and reach **New York City**. Running low on fuel and flying in the dark of night, they made the decision to land short of **New York**. Spotting the lights of **Bridgeport Airport**, they crash landed about fifty feet off the runway. Both were thrown from the aircraft but suffered only cuts and gashes. After recuperating, the pair were feted by the **New York** society and received a ticker tape parade down **Wall Street**.



The Mollison's de Havilland DH.84 Dragon

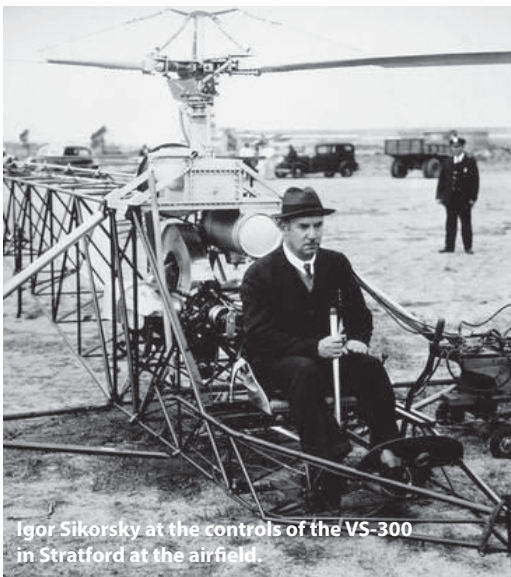


The Curtiss Hangar during a 1930's winter.



Amelia Earhart

On **November 5, 1936**, **Amelia Earhart** visited the airfield where she gave rides to a few lucky high school girls who were picked in a lottery. Only seven months later **Earhart** would go missing somewhere in the **Pacific**. In 1937 the **City of Bridgeport** purchased the airport after which it became known as the **Bridgeport Municipal Airport**. As war clouds began to loom on the horizon and **World War II** started to become an inevitability, production capability was expanded across the country. And **Connecticut** was of course no exception.



Igor Sikorsky at the controls of the VS-300 in Stratford at the airfield.

When it relocated to **Stratford**, **Sikorsky Aircraft** had become a division of **The United Aircraft Company** and, in 1939, it was decided to consolidate and merge the company's two aircraft manufacturers. **Chance Vought Aircraft** had been located in **East Hartford** and was part of **United Aircraft**. **Vought** moved to **Stratford** and the new organization became the **Vought-Sikorsky Aircraft Division**. On **September 14, 1939**, **Sikorsky** successfully test flew the **VS-300**, the world's first practical helicopter, which gained interest with the **US Army** and **Navy**.



Vought-Sikorsky XF4U Corsair prototype.

History - WWII to Present:

On **May 29, 1940** the **Vought XF4U Corsair** prototype took to the skies for the first time, becoming one of the best fighter aircraft of **World War II**. In **1943**, due to the pressing need for increases in **Corsair** production, **United Aircraft** decided to separate the two divisions, with **Sikorsky** moving to **Bridgeport** near **Seaside Park**, and **Vought** remaining in the plant in **Stratford**, to continue to develop the **F4U Corsair** production.

Charles Lindbergh, having been involved with **Sikorsky** and his flying boats for many years, became a consultant for **Chance Vought** during the war, and helped optimize the fuel efficiency for the **F4U Corsairs**, having to fly great distances in the **South Pacific**. **Vought** would end up producing more than **7000+** **Corsairs** at the **Stratford** plant and test fly them across the street at the airfield. **Vought** would go on to design and produce some early jet designs like the **F6U Pirate (1946)** and **F7U Cutlass (1948)** until the company decided to move to **Dallas, Texas** in **1948**.



Charles Lindbergh



Rare picture of the Curtiss hangars and Vought factory in 1943 with numerous newly built Corsairs.

After **World War II** the **Curtiss Hangar** was operated by the **Bridgeport Flight Service** for many years. In **1972** an all-metal pre-fab hangar was added onto the back of the aging building. On **December 31st 1998**, the **Bridgeport Flight Service** was locked out of their fuel farm by the airport over issues with rent & maintenance. From that point forward, the old hangar quickly began to fall into disrepair and became an eyesore with some even calling for it's demolition. By **2010**, the **Connecticut Air & Space Center** began seeking a suitable location to acquire and develop a publicly accessible museum for its growing collection of vintage aircraft / exhibits, and began to look into a long term lease for the hangar.

Preservation:

In 2015 while working with the Town of Stratford and City of Bridgeport, the **Connecticut Air & Space Center** was able to secure a 99-year lease for the dilapidated **Curtiss Aircraft Hangar**. After exhaustive investigation and checks by engineers, the structure was deemed sound and capable of being restored. Since the lease was signed, there have been significant progress on the structure itself including:

- Original wood roof decking removed
- All crumbling brickwork removed
- Original broken glass window panes removed
- Loose hangar door secured
- Vegetation cut down and controlled
- All FBO related tanks / equipment removed
- Blue pre-fab hangar redone into mini museum

Project Plan:

- **Phase # 1** - Blue Pre-fab hangar redone into mini museum to allow the public access into a portion of the museum and begin revenue stream. Numerous exhibits along with Corsair, Sikorsky S-52, S-55, S-60, OH-6, BD-5, and C-150 on display. Opened May, 2021. **Completed**
- **Phase # 2** - Curtiss Hangar restored to allow public access and use space to display additional aircraft including: CE Biplane, S-76, S-58, O-2A, T-33, T-38, H-13, OH-23, engines, etc. **In Progress**
- **Phase # 3** - Lean-to building attached to blue Pre-fab hangar and Curtiss Hangar restored along with second floor addition with observation deck, offices, classrooms, etc. **Pending**
- **Phase # 4** - Additional building acquired for aircraft project storage, fabrication shop, machine shop, wood shop, electronics shop, exhibits shop, archives, classrooms, etc. **Pending**



How the Curtiss Hangar looked in 2010.



The CASC's mini museum located in the metal pre-fab hangar. Opened in 2021.

Fundraising:

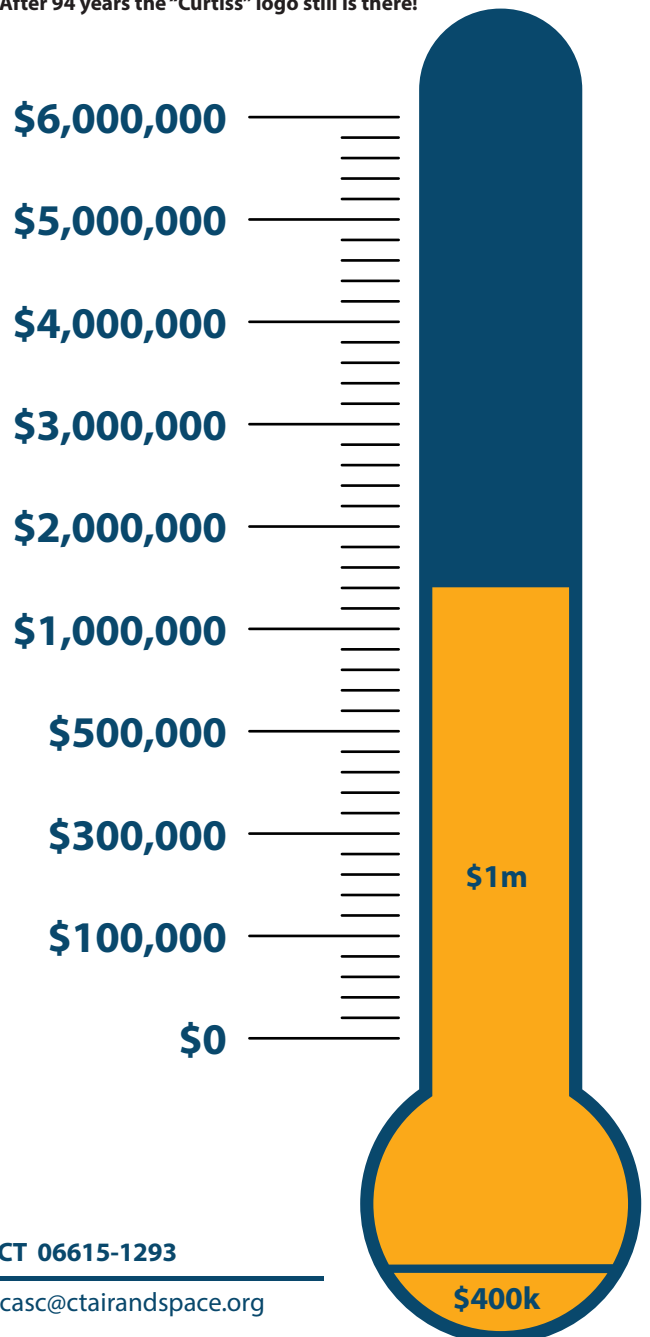
In 2018 the **Connecticut Air & Space Center** was awarded a \$1,000,000 grant from the state of Connecticut towards the preservation and restoration of the **Curtiss Hangar**. A further \$400k grant (left over from another previous project) was also added to the Hangar's project budget.

While the project is still in the beginning phases of the actual restoration process, the **CASC** continues to work with local government related officials to expedite the release of the \$1,000,000 grant, so construction can begin *As Soon As Possible*. While the combined \$1.4m is a significant amount to aid the **CASC** in its goal to preserve this historic structure, it still falls short of our overall financial goals and plans. With rising costs in labor and materials, it has become imperative for the **CASC** to secure additional funding. Not only to restore and complete the **Curtiss Hangar** back to its original splendor, but additional projects to help ensure the long-term survivability of the non-profit.

That is why the **CASC** is seeking up to an additional \$5,000,000 to help with acquiring an additional facility for aircraft storage, workshops, archives, classrooms, etc., so the museum will be able to thrive and expand as time and funding allows. All of this effort is to help the **CASC** become a significant regional cultural educational location like no other in **Southern Connecticut**, and allow visitors to truly grasp just how much aviation history happened here in **Connecticut**.



After 94 years the "Curtiss" logo still is there!



HELP SAVE HISTORY!



We hope you consider donating to the **Connecticut Air & Space Center's** noble endeavour to preserve this piece of our collective aviation history and restore this vintage **Curtiss Aircraft Hangar**, one of three or four still left in the **United States**. The museum is home to a growing collection of 18+ vintage aircraft, including the **Sikorsky Memorial Corsair**, and other amazing aviation artifacts from **Connecticut's** rich aviation heritage. When work is completed, you will be able to walk among aviation legends like **Charles Lindbergh**, **Howard Hughes**, and **Amelia Earhart** who sheltered their aircraft here. You will not only be able to just learn about history, but experience it first hand. Become part of that memory as we continue on this worthwhile and noteworthy project.



About the CASC:

Founded in 1998, the **Connecticut Air & Space Center** is a 501(C)3 non-profit, charitable organization dedicated to *honoring* the pioneers of early aviation, *preserving* examples of the aircraft they flew and *educating* this and future generations of their rich aviation heritage. The Center relies on volunteers who painstakingly piece together these aircraft and on the donations it receives from those in the public and private sectors.

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Aircraft Collection



1901 Whitehead No.21 Flyer (replica)

Full scale replica of the first man powered controlled flight aircraft. This replica was successfully flown in 1986 by builder Andy Kosch.



1945 Vought / Goodyear FG-1D Corsair

World War II Navy fighter plane. Over 7,000 were built at the plant here in Stratford, CT. This aircraft is currently under static restoration.



1948 Lockheed TV-2 / T-33 Shooting Star

1950's Jet Trainer. The P-80 was the fighter version of the TV-2 / T-33 that saw action in the Korean War.



1957 Cessna T-37 Tweet

Cold War Primary Jet Trainer. The combat version was the A-37 Dragonfly in Vietnam.



1961 Northrop T-38 Talon

Record breaking, two-seat, supersonic trainer. USAF Thunderbirds used T-38's for many years.



1967 Cessna O2 Skymaster

Vietnam & Counter Intelligence Observation Aircraft. Unique pusher / puller design.



1972 Bede BD-5 Miniplane

Extremely small Homebuilt kit offered in the 70's and 80's. Built in Stratford by Reinhard May.



1973 Cessna 150

Primary Civilian Flight Trainer since 1960. Over 23,949 built.



1977 Christen Eagle II

Popular, homebuilt kit, aerobatic biplane used in many competition aerobatic meets.

CONNECTICUT AIR & SPACE CENTER

Honor, Preserve, & Educate

Helicopter Collection



1946 Bell 47 / H-13 Sioux

Famous M*A*S*H helicopter.



1951 Hiller OH-23 Raven

Light-observation helicopter.



1952 Sikorsky S-52 / HO5S

First all-metal blade helicopter.



1954 Sikorsky S-55 / H-19 Chickasaw

US Army's first true transport.



1955 Sikorsky S-58 / H-34 Choctaw

Vietnam Veteran - US Navy anti-submarine warfare Helicopter.



1958 Sikorsky S-60 Flying Crane (prototype)

Igor Sikorsky's last personal design of a prototype, being a Heavy-Lift capable helicopter.



1967 Hughes OH-6A Cayuse

Light Observation Helicopter (LOH), is a Vietnam War combat veteran.



1977 Sikorsky S-76A

Medium-size commercial utility helicopter with twin turboshaft engines.

Powerplant Collection

- Avco Lycoming T-53 (Cutaway)
- Avco Lycoming LTP 101
- Avco Lycoming LTS101 Display
- Lycoming O-435-25A
- Lycoming 1320
- Jacobs 755
- Curtiss Wright 3300
- Pratt & Whitney R-2000
- Pratt & Whitney R-2800-99W
- Pratt & Whitney R-985
- Pratt & Whitney R-1340
- Pratt & Whitney J-57
- Pratt & Whitney J-47
- Pratt & Whitney J-42
- Pratt & Whitney T73 – Prototype
- Pratt & Whitney 4098

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AVIATION HISTORY FUN FACTS



1. **Igor Sikorsky** - Flew the **VS-300** on the *First Practical Helicopter Flight*, **September 14, 1939** at the **Bridgeport Airport**. The success of the **VS-300** led to the development of the **XR-4**, the first production helicopter.



2. **F4U Corsair** - The only **WWII** fighter aircraft designed and built entirely in one state by the three divisions of **United Aircraft Corporation**:

- **Vought-Sikorsky Aircraft** (Stratford, CT)
- **Pratt & Whitney Engines** (East Hartford, CT)
- **Hamilton Standard Propellers** (East Hartford, CT)

In 2005, it was designated as the **Official Aircraft of the State of Connecticut**.



3. **Famous Aviators** - The 1929 **Curtiss Hangar** saw visits from the likes of **Howard Hughes, Amelia Earhart, Charles Lindbergh, Igor Sikorsky, & Juan Trippe** and others, making it a truly historic landmark.



4. **First in Flight** - **Gustave Whitehead** was an early aviation pioneer from **Bridgeport, CT** who we believe flew his own aeroplane on August 14th, 1901- 2 years before the **Wright Brothers!**



5. **Crash Landing** - In July of 1933, pioneer aviator couple: **Jim Mollison & Amy Johnson** were flying nonstop from **South Wales to New York**. Low on fuel & flying in the dark, the pair survived a crash landing at **Bridgeport Airport**, currently known as **Igor I. Sikorsky Memorial Airport**.



6. **Powerplant Production** - **Bridgeport Avco Textron Lycoming**, (later **Allied Signal**) was the longest tenant in the **Stratford Army Engine Plant** and produced thousands of gas-turbine engines for the: **UH-1, AH-1, OV-1, CH-47, SB-1, BA 146, YA-9, XV-15, HH-43, K-1200, K-MAX, and M1 Abrams Tank**.

Original Photos of the Curtiss Hangar



The Curtiss Hangar during a 1930's winter.



The Curtiss Hangar circa late 1930's.

Original Photos of the Curtiss Hangar



Image of the Curtiss Hangar circa 1930's



Image of the airfield circa 1930's



Aerial picture of the airport taken on October 7, 1933



Curtiss Hangar circa 1980s

Current status of Curtiss Hangar



Photo by: **Sam Kent**



Photo by: **Sam Kent**

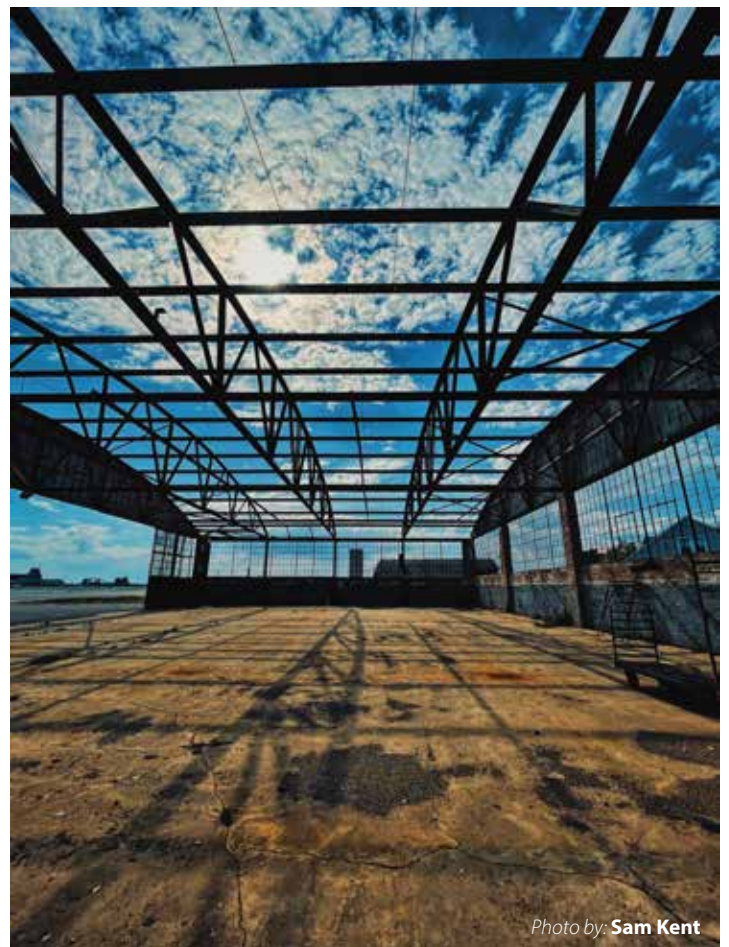
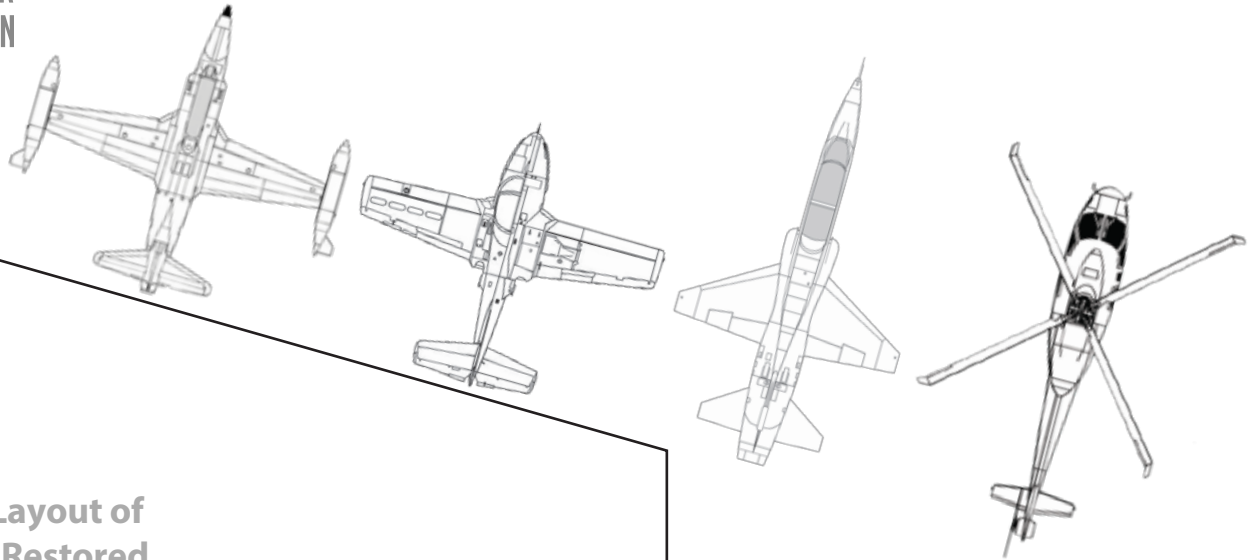


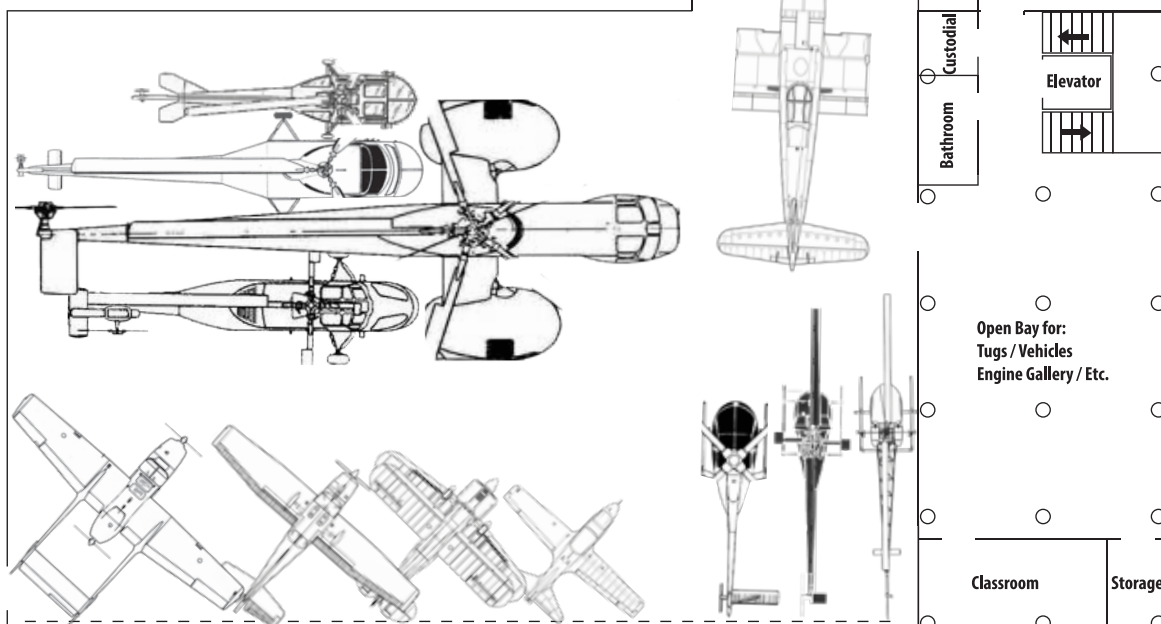
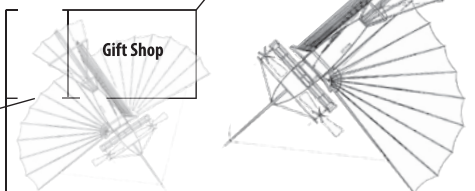
Photo by: **Sam Kent**



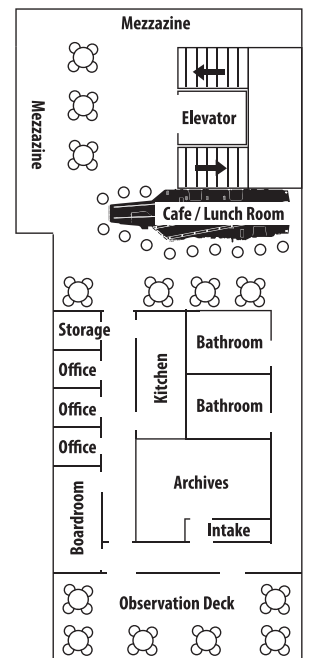
Potential Layout of Aircraft in Restored Curtiss Hangar

1st Floor

Hanging from Ceiling



2nd Floor



Links to Publications

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/air-space-magazine/glenn-curtiss-was-here-19082214/>

<https://warbirdsnews.com/warbirds-news/connecticut-air-space-center-news.html>

<https://timeorspace.com/tag/curtiss-hangar/>

<https://www.ctpost.com/local/article/Curtiss-hangar-slated-for-restoration-13248237.php>

<https://www.ctinsider.com/connecticutmagazine/news-people/article/Curtiss-Hangar-Renovation-Begins-On-Connecticut-17042540.php>



Original Postcard from Airport Dedication (July 5, 1929)



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