

# The Meaning of 100 Years

Written by Mike Pierce – March 16, 2016



*Aviation Week and Space Technology* (AW&ST), the magazine, okay – call it “the bible” of the industry, first published in August 1916. William Boeing founded The Boeing Company in 1916 as well. Also in 1916, The Austin Company began design and construction of its first (of many) aircraft assembly plants – one hundred years ago this year, the Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Company plant in Buffalo, New York. The precursor to Curtiss Wright.

So, we join AW&ST and Boeing in celebrating our centennials devoted to the aircraft industry. It is a remarkable and addictive market in which to play such a role. It got me thinking about the meaning of 100 years.

We currently marvel at the rapid pace of change, the introductions of technologies, and the challenges such change presents to us. To wit, the iPad was first introduced in 2010. Now five-and-a-half years into this tool, think about the many ways it has influenced our lives. Change these days is a lot faster than it used to be. Let’s consider the AW&ST, Boeing and Austin legacies.

Orville and Wilbur Wright took their first flight at Kitty Hawk in December 1903. Without the use of email, computers, cell phones, social media, etc., in twelve years this new industry was blossoming. First manned flight in a heavier than air machine, and twelve years later, Austin is building one of the largest buildings in the world to manufacture planes that were used to train World War I pilots, and later became the aircraft that started air mail service and barnstormer events.

That is a remarkable pace of change, especially for back then.

Austin designed and built a number of aviation-related projects following the Curtiss plant. A gentleman in the Seattle area named William Boeing had us build a small factory on Puget Sound in 1924, where he was manufacturing seaplanes – and so began one of the most storied relationships in the U.S. construction industry.

To succeed in industry in a free market, capitalist society, constant innovation is mandatory. W. Edwards Deming’s famous quote, “*It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory,*” resonates with the aviation industry. There is a long list of Austin aviation clients from the 20s, 30s and 40s, companies for whom we built major projects, whose names are all but forgotten. Our work continued through the 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s for more companies, some still remembered: Douglas, Eastern, Northwest, Continental, Fairchild, McDonnell, etc.

Importantly, many decades-long Austin clients are still the leaders: Northrop Grumman, Boeing, Pratt & Whitney, Bombardier, Lockheed Martin, United. And we continue to add new clients to our list, such as Airbus and Embraer.



# The Meaning of 100 Years

---

Along the way, Austin's many innovations contributed to the success of these companies by enabling them to operate in more efficient environments, optimize the flexibility of their operations, and meet aggressive schedules. As an example, what is now called Air Force Plant #4 in Fort Worth, Texas, was designed and built in 1941 by Austin in 180 days. The 4000' x 300' building, originally designed to manufacture B-24 Liberators, was used in the 70s, 80s and 90s to manufacture the F-16, and is now home to the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter – same building, 75 years later.

Austin architects, engineers and constructors devised many innovations for the aviation sector since its inception, such as bi-fold hangar doors, fiberglass wall panels for WWII bomber plants that saved metal, induced airflows to improve ventilation in large plants, rolling work platforms to speed schedules, and more.

It is a proud history. I like to say that Austin has aviation in our DNA. While Samuel Austin was our founder and established high standards of ethics, values and quality in his work, his son Wilbert was the innovator and visionary for aviation. Tragically, Wilbert died in a plane crash in Chicago in 1940.

By then, the DNA was well established.

In the one hundred years since the Curtiss project, Austin has had a formative role in this dynamic and ever-changing industry: airplanes, airports, engines, hangars, flight kitchens, cargo facilities, rockets, satellites. We have created these facilities in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Italy, Australia, Greece, UK, Japan, and other locations.

The tools we have used to accomplish these projects have changed as the technology has developed. But, some things have remained constant – a passion for this industry, an excitement toward how this market inspires and challenges us to innovate and achieve higher goals, and an appreciation of how this market drives us to technical excellence. This is where the DNA shows up. It is a great trait to have and it impacts all markets and industries we serve. Wilbert Austin was the father of innovation for Austin, and commercial air travel was his passion. Therefore, he found inspiration and motivation for innovation in creating buildings to serve this dynamic and exciting new mode of transportation that transformed human society in the 20th century.

One hundred years after Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Corporation, I think Wilbert would be proud of the legacy he bore. Imagine what two hundred years will look like.

*"MY BUILDINGS WILL BE MY LEGACY... THEY WILL SPEAK FOR ME LONG AFTER I'M GONE."*

JULIA MORGAN

