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Time flies

Stanley Hiller's new aviation museum showcases both the history and future of aviation in Northern California.

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News This Week

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Menlo fire district eyes a compromise deal under new county contract. **Page 5**

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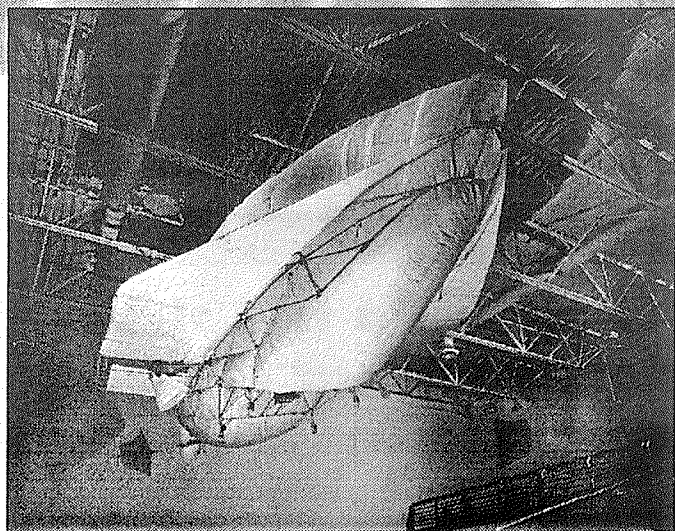
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Opening June 5,
Hiller Aviation
Museum spans
228 years
of flying in
Northern
California:
from 1869
to 2100.

The Boeing "Black Condor" symbolizes the Hiller Aviation Museum's focus on the future of aviation. The robotic airplane with a 201-foot wingspan can fly 19,000 miles and go 80,000 feet high; it may be a precursor of fleets of unmanned transports that will transport cargo across the Pacific Ocean in the next century.

Photos courtesy of the Hiller Aviation Museum



Frederick Marriott's "Avitor," inset, flew over the South San Francisco Bayfront 34 years before Kitty Hawk.

AVIATION

in Northern California: Linking past to future

By MARION SOFTKY

How many people know that the first honest-to-god airplane ever flown took off in San Mateo County in 1869?

Thirty-four years before the Wright Brothers first rode a flimsy biplane over the dunes at Kitty Hawk, Frederick Marriott (no relation to the later hotel chain) flew his unmanned Avitor for more than a mile over the shell mound racetrack in South San Francisco.

Now a replica of the Avitor — an unlikely looking airplane, with a big bag of hydrogen to help the 18-foot delta wings lift the craft, plus two propellers and a one-horsepower steam engine — hangs at the entrance to the great aircraft hall of the new Hiller Aviation Museum, which will

open at the San Carlos Airport June 5.

"It was the first real airplane to fly. It had modern controls of pitch and yaw and tilt," says aviation pioneer Stanley Hiller of Atherton, looking at the spacious room filled with the extraordinary craft that people have fashioned to challenge gravity and fly with the birds.

To Mr. Hiller, every one of the dozens of airplanes displayed in the great hall tells a story. Together, these stories add up to a history of heroism, innovation, and the march of an industry that has transformed and is still transforming our world. "We have great stories to tell," he says.

Mr. Hiller's collection — built over the past 30 years — highlights innovations that originated

in Northern California: overhead is a replica of Eugene Healy piloting the first airplane, a Curtiss Pusher, that landed and took off from the decks of an aircraft carrier, the U.S.S. Pennsylvania, in 1911 "That was the beginning of naval aviation," says Mr. Hiller.

Some 40 aircraft on display tell many stories. There are early gliders; Stanford's 1915 wind tunnel dug up from the fields near Interstate 280 near the radiotelescope "dishes"; a replica of the Fowler Gage that first flew non-stop coast-to-coast (over the Panama Canal) on a bet in 1913; an early Hiller-copter built by Mr. Hiller in Menlo Park; the flying platform that caught the imagination of the country during 1950s.

But Mr. Hiller's museum is about more than stories. It is

about educating people and preparing for the future role of aviation in the age of the Pacific Rim. The museum is also an accredited educational institution where experts can give extension courses for credit.

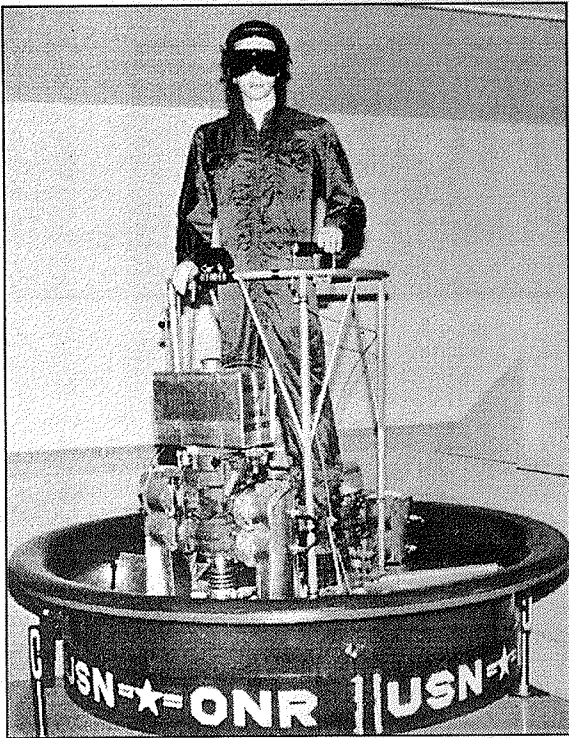
Mr. Hiller's museum reflects his vision of the history of aviation as prelude to its future. Each plane on display is a link to the future. "We're trying to mix past and future and convey to people what the future is going to look like," he says.

Besides the hall full of aircraft, the museum features a large atrium hanging with airplane models flying among clouds made of white balloons where up to 800 can enjoy a party. There, visitors will see the front 90 feet of America's first supersonic trans-

port (SST) being restored. It arrived two weeks ago in extremely dented condition and is undergoing intensive cleaning to be ready — maybe — for opening day.

To one side of the atrium, is a picture window to a 5,000-square-foot shop where the public can watch volunteers restoring old planes. Right now the "Black Diamond," an early airplane manufactured near the Black Diamond mine, east of Mt. Diablo, shows its delicate wooden skeleton stuck with shreds of dry, ragged cloth. It's being restored for the Smithsonian, says Mr. Hiller.

There will be lots of videos and interactive displays to help people learn about more than just what's on display. More than 400 aviation buffs have already signed up as volunteers.



Photos by Carol Ivie

The Hiller "flying platform," above, was the glamour aircraft of the 1950s. Its successor, the "Coleopter," shown here with Mr. Hiller, was designed in Menlo Park to take off vertically and then convert smoothly to horizontal flight as a 400 mile-per-hour airplane.



There is also a 50-seat interactive theater, equipped with seats from a Boeing 767 — first class, not economy.

Mr. Hiller says hopefully, "This is going to be a great venue for children of all ages."

Past as prologue

"Aviation has very deep roots in Northern California that have not been told. Even our little county produced more than 3,000 aircraft," says Mr. Hiller.

Actually, the Hiller Aircraft Company itself produced more than 3,000 aircraft at its plant on Willow Road between 1946 and 1964. Old-timers still remember looking south on the approach to the Dumbarton Bridge to see helicopters gently rising and falling like giant insects from the Hiller airfield.

Mr. Hiller likes to list other aviation firsts, besides the Avitor, in Northern California: the first take-off and landing from an aircraft carrier in 1911; the first chartered airfield in Grass Valley; the first airmail in Sacramento. Since 1910, Northern California has been home to nine or 10 engine manufacturers, 50 aircraft companies, and more than 600 airports or airstrips, he says.

Walking through the museum with Mr. Hiller, the visitor is caught up in the sweep, adventure and vision of "those magnificent men in their flying machines."

An airplane motor in the restoration shop was built in the Wright brothers' factory in Dayton Ohio; it powered R.B. Fowler's first transcontinental

flight from the Pacific to the Atlantic in 1911, Mr. Hiller says. He plans to mount it in a replica of the Wright B plane, and then build another replica of both engine and plane that will actually fly. "It's a beautifully done bit of history," he says. "It's a window into the thinking process of the Wright Brothers."

In the main hall near the Avitor, three gossamer gliders were built by James Montgomery, a professor at Santa Clara University. "He killed himself in the third," Mr. Hiller says.

A key link in the surge of aviation in California after World War I just arrived at the museum last week: an original Curtiss Jenny. These versatile trainers were built by the hundreds in California during the war, but never got to fight, Mr. Hiller says. After the war, "they were available at pennies on the dollar (for flying and barnstorming). That was the jump start for the next generation of aircraft."

Among the airplanes on display in the museum is the Varney Airlines Stinson Detourer in which Mr. Hiller learned to fly in 1937. Varney was the parent of today's United Airlines.

Mr. Hiller talks about aircraft that stretch the imagination. The flying submarine was canceled because the services couldn't figure out who would control it. Then there was the silent airplane, the Quiet Star; 11 were built "in great secrecy" by Lockheed at Bohannon Park in the 1960s for night surveillance in Vietnam. There's also the world's first gunship helicopter, and a portable he-

licopter kit — never used in battle — that pilots could assemble and take off in if they were shot down in the jungles of Vietnam.

Hiller Aircraft probably got the most public attention for its flying platform, which did many turns on television and the movies back in the 1950s. An outgrowth of that, which was tested but never flown, is the Coleopter, also on display. The futuristic plane, which sits like a flying platform shaped like a streamlined barrel, is designed to take off vertically like a platform and then convert to an airplane and fly forward.

Future vision

Hanging over the whole display is the "Condor," a robotic aircraft with a wingspan bigger than a Boeing 747. This provides Mr. Hiller's link to the aviation of the next century when he envisions fleets of unmanned transports carrying goods across the Pacific.

With a 201-foot wingspan, the Condor, can fly unmanned for 19,000 miles and reach 80,000 feet. The model on display came from the Atomic Energy Commission at Livermore and has been flown in service in the 1990s. It can fly by itself, check with weather stations, and choose its own route and altitude, Mr. Hiller says.

"All it needs to know when it starts is it has to go from A to B. It has the longest range of any large aircraft in the world," says Mr. Hiller. "It begins to tell a future story."

(Continued on next page)

STANLEY HILLER: PIONEER, BUSINESS WIZARD, VISIONARY

By MARION SOFTKY

The wall of Stanley Hiller's office at the new Hiller Aviation Museum is covered with company plaques. These represent a different and surprising facet of a man who is best known for building helicopters in Menlo Park from 1946 to 1964.

For the last 30 years, Mr. Hiller has specialized in taking troubled companies and

says.

Other names on the wall include Bekins movers; Bristol Compressors; Reed Tool, which makes drilling bits for oil wells; and Pacific Concrete and Rock. Most were older companies that got in trouble because "the market has changed and management hasn't," he says.

While these efforts have brought great satisfaction, Mr. Hiller is turning back to the field where he made his first mark. "These companies probably return a number of billions of dollars to their stockholders, and it all started with a little company called Hiller Aircraft, somewhere."

Indeed, during those 20 years Mr. Hiller's start-up churned out more than 3,000 helicopters at its plant on Willow Road. Besides helicopters, there were innovations, like the flying platform and its airplane successor, the Coleopter; a surveillance satellite, built for the government under direction of Lockheed at Hiller's plant; and a tilt-wing transport, pictured on his office wall, that could take off vertically and then fly forward. "This will reappear," he prophesies.

A fifth-generation Californian, Mr. Hiller was raised in Berkeley and learned to fly in 1937 in a Varney Airlines — later United — airplane now on display in the museum.

Not a young Icarus in love with flying, his motives were more down-to-earth. "My desire was to build a business. I was driven by the thought of new opportunities

(Continued on next page)



Photo by Carol Ivie

Helicopter pioneer Stanley Hiller imbues his museum with his vision of aviation's future in the commerce of the Pacific.

restoring them to profitability. The plaques represent just some of the 32 companies he has successfully turned around through the Hiller Investment Company, based at 3000 Sand Hill Road. "I've gone in at the request of banks or families and rebuilt them into very profitable entities," he says in an interview in his airy office with a picture window facing planes taking off from the San Carlos Airport.

York International is one. "It's the granddaddy of all air conditioning companies," he



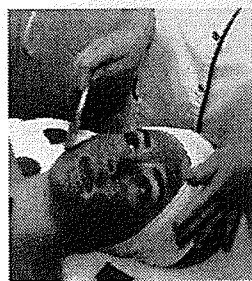
Photo by Carol Ivie

The wall of Stanley Hiller's office shows logos of some of the 32 companies he has helped turn around since selling Hiller Aircraft more than 30 years ago.



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COVER STORY

AVIATION

in Northern California: Linking past to future

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Unlike most air museums, which start with airplanes and then focus on space, Mr. Hiller's museum looks at aviation over the next century. "Few look at where airplanes are going," he says. "Aviation will be the controlling influence on commerce."

Air transportation has to play this role in the future economy of the Pacific Basin, Mr. Hiller believes. "You can't wait two weeks or a month while a ship is at sea. You need overnight delivery of cars and refrigerators — going both ways," he continues. "Heavy robotic freighters are going to knit the continents. Aircraft in all configurations are going to be the linkage bringing the world together."

Mr. Hiller's vision — and his museum — include Silicon Valley as the source of many products that will fuel the new era. Controls, self-healing components, miniaturization, sensors — "these are all new product opportunities for Silicon Valley," he says. "Silicon Valley will play an enormous role."

"I'm looking forward to the next 100 years."



Photo by Marion Softky

This 90-foot nose of a supersonic transport (SST) is being cleaned so it can be installed in the entrance hall of the Hiller Aviation Museum, and restored to its original elegance.

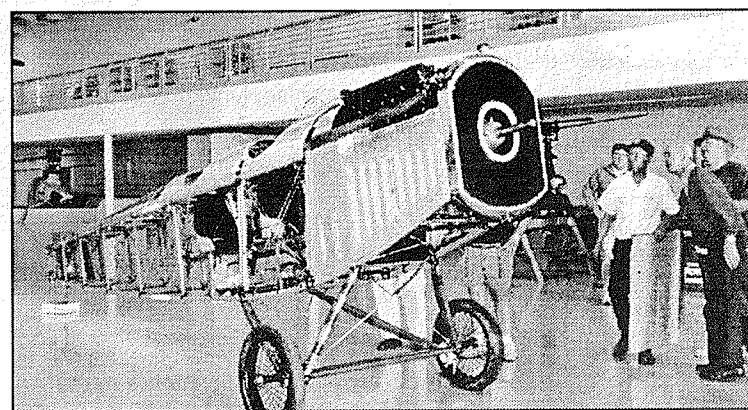


Photo by Marion Softky

This Curtiss "Jenny" trainer, just being unloaded at the Hiller museum, was produced by the hundreds in California during World War I. Cheap and abundant, Jennies helped jump-start the state's aviation boom.

STANLEY HILLER

(Continued from previous page)

in vertical lift," he says.

Mr. Hiller, who would rather talk about machines and vision than himself, admits there were some adventures on the way to building successful helicopters. "We used to land in and out of Berkeley. No one had ever seen a helicopter out here," he recalls. "I've been in three major crashes. I couldn't afford a fourth."

Mr. Hiller and his wife,

Caroline, have lived in Atherton for the last 50 years.

Hiller Aircraft Co. incorporated in 1942, produced its first official helicopter in 1944, and moved to Menlo Park in 1946, Mr. Hiller says. It was one of four helicopter companies in the country, the only one in the West. Since then it's racked up numerous firsts, including the first helicopter to be licensed as inherently stable. "It can fly itself," Mr. Hiller says.

After 20 years building

helicopters, Hiller Aircraft merged with Fairchild, the Menlo Park plant closed, and Mr. Hiller moved into his new career of working with troubled companies.

He didn't cut all his ties with airplanes, however, and began his collection. "I left aircraft, but I wanted to keep in touch," he says. "I collected with the feeling there was a great opportunity to link past and future together."

Linking past and future is what the Hiller Aviation Museum does. "It's been fun," he says.

Opening day events for aviation museum

Ceremonies celebrating the opening of the Hiller Aviation Museum at the San Carlos Airport will start Friday, June 5, at 9:15 a.m. with flybys of antique airplanes. At 9:45, acrobatic pilot Eddie Andreini will cut the first ribbon with the propeller of his Super Stearman. Later, Allen Silver will parachute down to cut another ribbon.

The event marks the opening of the museum which tells the story of aviation in Northern California starting in 1869 and looking into the future until 2100.

On Sunday, June 7, the San Carlos Airport will

hold an open house from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. featuring tower and museum tours, airplane and helicopter rides, flybys, precision kite teams, food, and entertainment. Rides in a Citation jet will cost \$100 to raise money for local youth groups.

The museum is located at 601 Skyway Road, adjacent to Bayshore Freeway at the San Carlos Airport. Take the Holly St. exit.

Museum hours are from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$4 for seniors and children 12-17, and free for younger children.

For information call 654-0200, or check the museum's web site: www.hiller.org.