

By DONNA HUNT

There's nothing like having breakfast with "Queen Elizabeth" (the first) and spending time with Orville and Wilbur Wright, all in the same day.

This is what happened a couple of weeks ago prior to the spring board meeting of the National Federation of Press Women on the Outer Banks of North Carolina at Kill Devil Hills – the next door neighboring town to Kitty Hawk.

Kill Devil Hills is the home of a long-time very good Press Woman friend, Gwen White, with whom I share duties of directing the national communications contest.

Gwen had planned a weekend retreat for the NFPW board and chairpersons, complete with a three-story beach house overlooking Albemarle Sound and lots of activities for those of us who came in two days early.

First stop was a special community benefit breakfast presided over by Queen Elizabeth I, also known as Barbara Hird, native of Yorkshire England. Barbara starred with Chris Chappell as Sir Walter Raleigh in a play, "Shepherd of the Ocean" later in the week.

But on the morning of the breakfast, the queen, was attired in a velvet Elizabethan dress that cost \$10,000 (you know reporters, they ask questions and we asked the price of the dress). She had recently returned from the world premier in Youghal, Ireland, where the one act play was the centerpiece of the Sir Walter Raleigh Festival. (The spelling of Raleigh correct in this play.) The queen graciously posed for pictures with our group of eight.

Next stop was a short trip down the road for a visit with the Wright Brothers – or at least their museum and the field where they made their famous flight(s).

Darrell Collins, a public relations representative of the museum, where the 100th anniversary of that flight was celebrated in 2003, was one of the best guides I ever have seen in a museum of this type. He really brought the brothers to life as he told the story of how a toy wooden Penaud helicopter brought home to them by their father, a circuit-riding preacher became a bishop in the United Brethren Church.

The two brothers set up the Wright Cycle Company shop in Dayton, Ohio instead of completing high school. In their spare time they spent a lot of time building kites for their own amusement. But that little helicopter powered by twisted rubber bands impressed them so deeply that they began studying the science of aerodynamics. Building bicycles gave them the mechanical tools to begin working on their contraption. They were convinced that the airplane would be unstable like a bicycle. Their skill and knowledge made flying similar to riding a bike.

The Wright family included the Bishop, their mom, who was the mechanical one in the family, one sister and four boys. Two of the boys married, but Orville and Wilbur did not.

The brothers were convinced that "control" was the key to human flight and from 1899 to 1902 they worked on gliders trying to control them. In 1900 they built a man-carrying glider as they researched the wind. They learned that Chicago was the windiest city but that Kitty Hawk was sixth on the list. So in September 1900 they flew their glider basically as a kite with a man on board at Kitty Hawk. Then in August 1901 they built the largest ever glider, but it didn't work.

With that failure they made their way back to Ohio, ready to quit. That year in the bike shop they reworked the formula

and designed a true wing of an airplane using high school math. There were no computers, calculators or slide rules, but the glider came out of their study incorporating all the true traits of an airplane as we know it today.

In 1903 they made a powered machine in their Ohio shop and shipped the parts to Kitty Hawk. Here they were assembled in a shack on the property, which we were allowed, to tour. Some parts didn't work like they wanted them so they were back to Ohio a third time.

On Dec. 14 that year the brothers flipped a coin and Wilbur became the first one to try to fly. Wilbur shot into the air and experienced the first stall in aviation history. The flight lasted three and a half seconds and flew 105 feet which wasn't considered successful. It took three days to repair the damage done on that flight.

On Dec. 17, Orville took his turn while the wind was gusting off the Atlantic. A 10:35 a.m. flight took Orville into history traveling 120 feet in 12 seconds.

At 11:40, a second flight of the day was attempted and the machine was overturned and damaged by a gust of wind.

A third attempt was made with Orville at the wheel and this time the plane flew 200 feet in 15 seconds.

Then at noon Wilbur took off again. This time he was airborne for 59 seconds and traveled 852 feet. Not a single reporter was present to document the event. Actually there was no one there to see and record this great event that was a prelude to man's quest for air travel.

The Wright brothers taught Europeans to fly and in 1908 people came from all over the continent to watch Wilbur fly. French acquired the patent and the brothers gave flying lessons there, bringing in a quarter of a million in cash. In 1909 they formed their second company in Germany and later in New York. By now they had become millionaires. But with the start of World War I, all patents were voided and the brothers lost it all.

Orville came back to Kitty Hawk in 1925 and Amelia Earhart also visited the area. The four flights are noted with 1, 2, 3, & 4 markers down the runway to show the distance of each flight.

It is said that the Wright Brothers' original patent was at least 70 years before its time. Flying caught on. By 1969, a year before Orville died, Neil Armstrong became the first man to set foot on the moon, just 66 years after The Wrights' first flight.

Chuck Yeager had broken the speed of sound and other great accomplishments have been noted including the Vin Fiz 1911, the box-kite airplane that was the first to fly over Denison and Pottsboro on the first transcontinental flight. When Armstrong stepped onto the moon he had in his possession a piece of the cloth from that famous Wright Airplane which Collins emotionally displayed.

The journey from Kitty Hawk to Tranquility Base was a giant step for mankind. If air travel in the next 100 years is half as glorious as the past 100 years, the future will truly be something for our children to witness.

The Wright brothers certainly changed the course of history.