

# A Genealogical History of the Wright Family

By Nick Engler

Bishop Milton Wright was a dedicated genealogist who boasted that he could trace his lineage back eleven generations to “his great-grandfather’s great grandfather,” Sir John Wright, Lord of Kelvedon Hall in Essex County, England, born 1485, died 1551. And the Bishop had cause to be proud. In the days before the Internet and the massive online collections of family records that are available to us in the twenty-first century, genealogical research depended on notes kept in a family Bible, hints from family letters and oral traditions, and correspondence with far-away clerics and government officials who often had better things to do than answer a query about a long-dead parishioner or citizen. For Milton to trace his family back through four centuries and across two continents was a singular accomplishment in his day.

Today we know a great deal more about the Wright lineage; more than the Bishop could ever have imagined. Because the Internet provides a way for far-flung people to instantly share information, genealogical and biographical information accumulates quickly. In Milton’s day there was a trickle of information, today there is a flood. The problem becomes not whether we can find information about an ancestor, but whether we can trust it. The river of digital information that flows around us is full of tall tales, half-truths, and downright lies. All information must be carefully winnowed to separate the facts from the fictions. Consequently, genealogy today is not just a quest but a science. Family histories evolve as new information is examined and proven, sometimes replacing older and less reliable traditions. We don’t just know more than Bishop Milton Wright, we tell the story of the Wright Family differently than he would have told it.

## ***Wright Beginnings circa 1050 CE***

### **The Normans**

We can trace Wilbur’s and Orville’s ancestry back to just before the invasion of England by the Normans under William the Conqueror in 1066 CE, which is just about as far as genealogists can trace any family. Surnames were just coming into use in Normandy in the eleventh century; before that time there were no family names to trace. If you were the son or daughter of royalty, histories and oral traditions might take you back a few centuries, but there were no records for common people for the simple reason that there were no family names to record.

The Normans (Old French for Norse men) had settled on the northern coast of France long before William’s time. They were the descendants of Saxon Vikings from the Jutland peninsula (present-day Denmark) who had colonized that region beginning about 400 CE as the Roman Empire collapsed and the Romans withdrew. From here, the Saxons and other Viking tribes launched multiple invasions of the British Isles, displacing the Britons and pushing them westward. Eventually the Saxons and others established the Heptarchy in England, a loose association of tiny kingdoms, among them Essex, Wessex, and Sussex. (The names once meant East Saxons, West Saxons, and

South Saxons.) Over several centuries, the political ties between these kingdoms became stronger until they were finally united – more or less – under Aethelstan of Wessex, first King of England, in 924 CE.

The ancient bond to Normandy remained, strengthened from time to time with marriage, political favors, and military support. It was an exchange of favors that precipitated the Norman invasion. King Edward I (1042 to 1066) angered some powerful nobles in England and took refuge in Normandy under the protection of William II, Duke of Normandy. In return, Edward, who had no heir, promised William his throne when he died. Things cooled down and Edward was able to return to England, but upon his death the nobles awarded the English throne to Harold Godwinson, Earl of Wessex, who became King Harold II in 1066. This royally miffed William, who gathered an army, invaded England, and killed Harold at the Battle of Hastings that same year.

William's invading army was equipped in part by a renowned weapons manufacturer from Bayeux, Normandy -- John Wryta. And with William came five of John's sons.

### **John Wryta, circa 1050**

The surnames the Normans chose for themselves were gathered from locations, events, personal attributes, and occupations. "Wryta" or "wryde" was an Old Saxon term for a skilled craftsman. John Wryta was a skilled carver, woodworker, and metalsmith. He was especially known for making weapons from both wood and metal. And he taught this trade to his sons John, Richard, William, Henry, and Thomas Wryta. Richard and William were accomplished warriors prior to the Norman invasion; they were knighted for bravery by William the Conqueror while he was still just the Duke of Normandy. William Wryta, in fact, was captain of the soldiers who served as the Duke's bodyguards.

John, Henry, and Thomas were knighted soon after the Norman invasion in return for the parts they had played in the victory. All five of the Wryta brothers were rewarded with grants of land and manors in the former kingdoms of Essex, Sussex, and East Anglia, which became counties under Norman rule. We don't know which Wryta got what land, but we do know that at least one of the brothers settled in the vicinity of Kelvedon Hatch in Essex County, northeast of London. Grants of land often came with the responsibility of maintaining bridges in the vicinity, and the Wrights were given the responsibility for a bridge over the Ingrebourne River. This became "Wright's Bridge" and later, "Wrightsbridge." There is still a Wrightsbridge Road just three miles south of Kelvedon Hatch.

And here the lineage breaks. Genealogists cannot draw a straight line from John Wryta to the Wright brothers; we don't know which of John's sons was Milton Wright's many-times-great-grandfather. It's no wonder -- these were dangerous times. Family records, if they were kept at all, were often lost or destroyed. The Battle of Hastings did not accomplish William's conquest of England; he fought to subdue the lands for most of his reign. In 1135, England descended into civil war when King Henry I died and his only legitimate son drowned in the English Channel. The Welsh kingdom of Gwynedd challenged England, was subdued and absorbed, and then revolted. During the next two centuries the Scots invaded England twice, the country was drained of money and manpower as Richard I led the Third Crusade to the Holy Lands, the Magna Carta was

forced upon John I to limit his excesses, the Black Death decimated the population, and England entered into the Hundred Years War with France. Record-keeping took a back seat to chaos.

But the few records that remain from this time do mention the Wryta family, sometimes as prominent players in this history. They pop up as knights, lords, judges, architects, soldiers, and members of the government. They spread out across England, Scotland, and Ireland. The surname morphs from Wryta to Wryte to Wrihte and finally Wright. One fanciful tale mentions a carpenter, John Wright, in Sir William Wallace's army at the Battle of Stirling Bridge in 1297. Wallace led the Scots in a war of independence, and this was an important victory for his cause. According to an historian/poet remembered as "Blind Harry," Wright cleverly sabotaged the bridge over the Forth River at Stirling, Scotland, causing it to collapse as the English army marched across. Some of the English soldiers were drowned; most were caught in the muddy bogs surrounding the bridge and were cut down by Wallace's archers and spearmen. Blind Harry's account may be fiction, but it shows that the Wright surname had spread across the British Isles in just a few centuries.

## ***First in Line circa 1400 CE***

### **Thomas Wright, 1365 to ?**

The first person we can say with some surety was an ancestor of the Wright brothers was Thomas Wright, born in Essex County, England in 1365. It was during the reign of King Edward III (1327 to 1377); the Hundred Years War with France was an on-again-off-again affair that drained England's blood and treasure; and the country was still recovering from the Black Death which had killed half the population in 1348. During Thomas's lifetime, spoons came into common use and Geoffrey Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales*. We know very little about Thomas's personal history. We haven't yet discovered the name of his wife, how many children they had, and when he passed away. We don't even know with certainty that his name was Thomas; in some documents he is referred to simply as "Father." However, we do know that he had at least one son, also called Thomas Wright, born in 1396.

### **Thomas Wright, 1396 to 1492**

Thomas Wright was born in White Notley, Essex County, England in 1396. He became the lord of the manor in which he was born and was later "ennobled," that is, made a member of the peerage and given a noble title by the king, possibly Henry V (1413 to 1422) or Henry VI (1422 to 1461). In the Thomas's time, land was inherited but titles were not; they were conferred by the king, usually based on the amount of land a person controlled. During Thomas's long life (he lived to the unusually old age of 96) the fortunes of England waxed and waned. Under Henry V, the English crown gained control of France, but his son Henry VI failed to consolidate these holdings and the two nations drifted apart again. Sometime before 1424, Thomas married Agnes Hunt of Gosfield in Essex County, and the two of them moved to Upminster, on the northeast outskirts of London. They had at least one son, Henry Wright, born in 1424. Both Thomas and Agnes passed away in 1492, just as America was being discovered.

### **Reverend Henry Wright, 1424 to ?**

Henry Wright was born in 1424 in Upminster, Essex County, England. He joined the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church at Upminster and took the title “Reverend,” although he was not a priest. He probably served as a deacon or in another lay position. The first English civil war – the War of the Roses -- broke out in 1455 and during Henry’s lifetime, the throne of England passed to three separate families, the Houses of Lancaster, York, and Tudor. It was also during his lifetime, in 1477, that the first book was printed in England. He married Anna Whitbread sometime before 1450 and the two of them moved to Dagenham, slightly west of Upminster and nearer to London. Henry and Anna had six children: John, William, Richard, Henry, Thomas, and Katherine. Note that the five boys bore the same names as John Wryta’s five sons in 1066. It’s not known whether Henry and Anna chose these names because of family tradition or because they wanted to advertise that the family was Norman in origin. Although it was 400 years since England had been conquered, there was still definite division between the old Vikings (the Saxons) and the new Vikings (the Normans), with the Normans – the landowners – very definitely on top.

### **Reverend Sir John Wright, circa 1450 to 1509**

Henry’ son John was born about 1450 in Dagenham, Essex County, England. Like his father, he was a cleric at Upminster and an “avowdson” of the church, having the right to nominate and appoint clerical staff. He married Agnes about 1480. Her surname is not known for certain; it may have been Kelvedon, but she also may have been Agnes of Kelvedon. John and Agnes had at least one child, also named John Wright, about 1485. There may have been other children; documents mention Edmund, James, Thomas, Nicholas, Fridewold, and Johane Wright, all from the same region during the same period. One or more of these could have been the sons or daughters of John and Agnes, but the records are not clear. The records do show, however, that John was both successful and prosperous. He earned a reputation as a theologian and was knighted, possibly for his work in theology.. He might also have earned his knighthood in the War of the Roses; he was in his twenties when the House of York deposed Lancaster in 1471 and Edward IV (1461-70, 1471-83) took the throne for a second time. He wore the title Reverend Sir John Wright and whatever the source of his title and position, it provided enough money to acquire more land, including Hoo Hall Manor near to where his grandfather Thomas had been born. He and Agnes moved sometime during their marriage, settling in Kelvedon Hatch where John died in 1509, just as Henry VIII (1509 to 1547) came to the throne.

## ***Landed Gentry circa 1500 CE***

### **Sir John Wright, Lord of Kelvedon Hall, circa 1485 to 1551**

Sir John Wright was born in Dagenham, Essex County, England. He married Olive Hubbard in the South Weald Church, Essex County (near Wrightsbridge) on 17 March 1508. Olive had also been born in Dagenham. They had seven children – John the Elder, Katherine, Robert, Alice, John the Myddle, John the Younger, and Elizabeth. As Henry VIII ascended the throne, he granted John Wright peerage, giving him a seat in the House of Lords. John became a baron and took the title Sir John Wright. He was also granted a

coat of arms – an azure shield with silver bars and a leopard’s head. The family motto was “Conscia recti,” a Latin phrase from Aeneid meaning “a clear conscience.”

Sir John personally served King Henry VIII during the “King’s Great Matter,” during which Henry petitioned Pope Clement VII to annul his marriage to Catharine of Aragon. Catherine had not produced an heir to his throne, and Henry asked the Pope to give him leave to marry Ann Boleyn, his mistress and a lady in Catherine’s entourage. The Pope refused, and Henry severed the Church of England from the Roman Catholic Church in 1533. Whatever Sir John’s role was in this event, it pleased the King and John became a rich man for his efforts. He turned his attention to building a suitable home for a man of his means and station.

Sometime before 1509, John had moved to Kelvedon Hatch with his father. The Domesday Book, a census ordered by King William I in 1086, mentions Kelvenduna, a feudal estate lorded over by a Saxon soldier/sailor, Aethelric. It’s thought that Aethelric may have built St. Nicholas, the oldest surviving church in the area. In 1066, Aethelric had sailed off to fight William the Conqueror, the Wryta brothers, and other Norman invaders. The defeated Aethelric returned to Kelvenduna and continued as lord of the manor under William I. Not long afterwards, however, he fell ill and died. His property passed to the church, probably confiscated by King William – as William did his with many Saxon freeholders who fought against him. The ownership of the Kelvenduna estate passed to “St Peter” – the Norman arm of the Roman Catholic Church headquartered in Westminster Abbey. Specifically, it passed to Odo, the Bishop of Bayeux and William’s half-brother. This was William’s way of keeping the spoils of war in the family.

John erected Kelvedon Hall next to the old Saxon church allegedly built by Aethelric. Its construction took 14 years, beginning in 1524. In 1538, he bought the surrounding lands – about 2000 acres – from Richard Bolles and Westminster Abbey for £493. Bolles had inherited the tenancy of the lands from his mother’s family, the Multons, who had in turn been granted the tenancy in 1225 from Westminster Abbey. This real estate deal reeked of politics. The transfer of lands from the church to the loyal gentry was part of Henry’s campaign to weaken the power of the Roman Catholic Church in England. Sir John Wright II died in Kelvedon Hall on 5 October 1551. His wife Lady Olive Hubbard Wright died in Kelvedon Hatch on 22 June 1560.

### **John (the Myddle) Wright, 1522 to 1558**

Middle John Wright was born in Kelvedon Hall in 1522. According to his father’s will, executed in 1551, “To my son called Myddle John I give all the land I have in Havering and houses and millers house and a tenement in Childerditch wherein Gibbes doth dwell.” This was the area where the bridge that the Wrights had tended for centuries spanned the Ingrebourne River. The land was known as Wrightsbridge, and the manor house and estate was referred to both as Wrightsbridge Manor and Dagenham Manor.

During his time, Englishmen identified each other less and less as Norman and Saxon and became much more concerned with who was Catholic and who was Protestant (Anglican). Middle John and his siblings were mostly Protestant, their father having supported Henry VIII’s break with Rome. But in 1553, just before Middle John’s death,

Henry VIII's daughter Mary I (1553-1558) came to the throne and pressed for England to return to Catholicism. She was ruthless in this endeavor, had over 280 Protestant dissenters burned at the stake, and earned the sobriquet "Bloody Mary." Fortunately for the Wrights and other Protestants, her reign was short and the persecution ended when her Protestant sister Elizabeth I (1558-1603) came to the throne. But it was a harbinger of things to come; the tensions between religious sects in England continued to grow.

Middle John married Alice Rucke of Kelvedon Hatch in 1541. They had six children, Dorothy, John, Mary, Olive, Agnes, and Robert. Middle John died in Wrightsbridge in 1558 when he was just 36 years old. His wife Alice did not live much longer; she died in 1560.

### **Lord John Wright of Wrightsbridge, 1548 to 1624**

Middle John's first son, John Wright, was born in 1548 and inherited the Wrightsbridge lands and Dagenham Manor when he was just 10 years old. He was granted peerage by Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) in 1590 and given a seat in the House of Lords. He was married twice, the first time to Elizabeth Linsell about 1568. She bore him three sons and two daughters – John, Samuel, Jane, Nathaniel, and Elizabeth. His first wife died in 1589 and John married Bennett Greene in 1590. He had three more children with her – Lawrence, Bennett, and William.

They lived in auspicious times, Elizabethan England was a foment of new ideas and opportunities. Francis Bacon codified the Scientific Method, William Harvey mapped the circulatory system, and Sir Francis Drake sailed around the world. In 1587, the English took an interest in colonizing America and finally succeeded in 1607. The King James Bible was published in 1611, making this book available in English for the first time. England's agrarian economy expanded to include large-scale manufacturing and global trade. Young men left the rural manors and filled the cities, becoming doctors, lawyers, and merchants. From these new urban professionals emerged a literate middle class who devoured the plays of Shakespeare and the books of Milton and loudly debated the finer points of politics, philosophy, and religion.

Among these new ideas was Puritanism. Henry VIII's break with the Pope had been welcome in England not because the English wanted their King to have his marriage annulled, but because of the excesses and the failures of the Catholic Church. The Church of England was the beginning of the Reformation in England, but many felt it did not reform enough. The Anglican church retained much of the pomp and ceremony of the Catholic church it had replaced. More important, the rigid clerical hierarchy remained – the King and had simply replaced the Pope. Moreover, English protestants who fled to other countries during the reign of Mary I brought back to England the ideas of John Calvin and other contemporary theologians. This stew of religious ideas gave rise to the Puritans, who emerged largely from the new English middle class. As a group, they proposed less pomp and more substance. They rejected the hierarchy and the notion of a supreme spiritual leader to whom they owed allegiance. They wanted their congregations to have more autonomy and their God to be more accessible. At least two of Lord Wright's sons John and, Nathaniel, had strong Puritan leanings.

Lord John Wright died at Wrightsbridge in 1624 as the Puritan movement reached its strongest ebb – and a year before they faced their greatest challenge.

### **John Wright, Esq., 1569 to 1640**

John Wright was born in 1569 at Wrightsbridge, Essex County, England. Although firstborn, there is no record that he inherited the Wrightsbridge lands or Dagenham manor. Instead, he seems to have had a successful career in London. He graduated from Emmanuel College at Cambridge University (a hotbed of Puritan radicals) in 1593 and was admitted as a barrister to Gray's Inn (an influential legal association) in 1598, and began a clerkship in the Courts that same year. He married Martha Castell in 1594, and they had four sons – John, Nathaniel, Samuel, and Robert. Martha died in 1610 and John remarried to Fortune (Garraway) Blount, the widow of Sir Edward Blount, in 1618. John and Fortune had one child, James.

In 1612 John Wright, Esq. was appointed a clerk to the House of Commons. Because of this appointment – and because he was a Puritan-leaning Protestant – he was probably at odds with his Anglican father in the House of Lords from time to time. It was a frustrating time for any member of the government; King James I (1603-1625) steadfastly refused to share any real power with Parliament. A Parliamentary document protesting the actions of King James I bears John Wright's signature on it in his capacity as clerk of the House of Commons. This display of opposition to the King by a family member would no doubt have embarrassed a Peer of the House of Lords. We don't know how well John got along with his father, but if they had religious and political differences this may explain why John did not inherit his father's land, at least in part.

Goings on outside Parliament may have also strained the relationship between father and son. While Puritans weren't put to death for their beliefs, they weren't well-tolerated by Anglicans. They were blocked again and again from making reforms to the Church of England and some Anglican bishops openly oppressed Puritan-leaning ministers and congregations. Anti-Puritan sentiment within the government and the Church of England was controlled under King James I (1603-1625), but it was unleashed when his son Charles I (1625-1649) took the throne. He permanently dissolved the Parliament in 1629 and what had been an extremely difficult situation for Puritans in England became hopeless. Puritans began to emigrate to less hostile lands. In 1630, Puritans obtained a royal charter to form the Massachusetts Bay Colony. John's brother Nathaniel was a charter member and 1/8 owner of the *Arabella*, flagship of the fleet that carried Puritans to the New World. John's son Samuel was among those who sailed. John Wright, Esq. remained and died in Dagenham in 1640, only a few years after Samuel left for America.

## ***A Nation of Saints circa 1650 CE***

### **Deacon Samuel Wright, 1606 to 1665**

Samuel Wright was born in 1606 in Wrightsbridge, Essex County, England. He attended Emmanuel College of Cambridge University like his father, graduating in 1624. And like his father, he became a dyed-in-the-wool Puritan. He married Margaret Dickerson in 1625. Samuel and Margaret had four children together while they lived in England –

Samuel Jr., Margaret, Hester (or Esther), and Lydia. About 1636, they sailed with these four children to America where they had four more – James, Judah, Mary and Helped.

Samuel and his family were part of the “Great Migration” in which 80,000 Puritans left England between 1629 and 1640, during the years that King Charles I (1625-1649) had suspended Parliament. Religious repression was rampant during this period and with an unsympathetic king on the throne and Parliament gone, the Puritans had no way to redress their grievances. They emigrated to Ireland, the Netherlands, the West Indies, and America. About 20,000 of them traveled to New England, settling mostly in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut.

The migration began in the summer of 1630 with the "Winthrop Fleet" – eleven ships carrying 800 people under the guidance of John Winthrop and bound for Massachusetts. These ships and others continued to sail back and forth across the Atlantic for a decade ferrying Puritans intent on building a “nation of saints” in the New World. It is impossible to underestimate the effect that this migration of literate, socially-cohesive, working-class families had on the subsequent history of America. The Puritans thought of this as a Second Exodus in which Charles I was the Pharaoh and they were God’s Chosen People. They formed the basis for a uniquely American society with a respect for education, hard work, religious freedom, and personal autonomy, each member with a conviction that they were the apple of God’s Eye.

Samuel Wright and his family stayed for a while near the coast of Massachusetts, then in 1638 accompanied William Pynchon and other colonists to a Native American village named Agwam on the Connecticut River, where they settled the town of Springfield. Samuel was part owner of a toll bridge there and helped build a mill dam. In 1652 the pastor of the First Congregational Church in Springfield returned to England and Samuel was employed to “dispense the word of God in this place” for fifty shillings per month. It was during this time he earned the title “Deacon.” Deacon Samuel Wright left Springfield about 1656, traveled up the Connecticut River and settled Northampton, Massachusetts, where he built a mill and continued to serve as a deacon. He died in 1665 at age 59 “while sleeping in his chair.”

### **James Wright, 1639 to 1725**

James was one of the first native-born citizens of the “nation of saints.” He was born in Springfield, Massachusetts in 1639, then moved to Northampton with his family about 1656. He married Abigail Jess in Northampton about 1662, and she bore him nine children – Abigail, Helped, James, Lydia, Samuel, Preserved, Jonathan, Hester, and Nathaniel. His father Samuel gave him four acres in Northampton and he lived there with his wife all his life.

We know very little about James and his children for the simple reason that the first colonists were a little too preoccupied to keep many records. Massachusetts was a beachhead for Europeans in America and they fought the natives to keep it. When the Wampanoag natives weren’t attacking them, the colonists faced disease and famine.

We do know that James fought in King Phillip’s War – the first true war with Native Americans. Twelve Puritan settlements were burned to ground and James’ brother



Samuel Wright Jr. was shot and killed as he led a small contingent of soldier-settlers. James served under Captain William Turner and fought at the Battle of Turner's Falls in 1676, in which his band attacked a poorly-defended village of Wampanoag and slaughtered many of them. Some of the warriors escaped, regrouped and counterattacked the colonists. William Turner was killed, but James escaped.

The latter half of James' life was apparently more peaceful, although there were some memorable moments. In 1692, 150 people were accused and 20 executed in the "witch trials" of Salem, Massachusetts. The English passed the Wool Act in 1699, forbidding the export of wool from the American colonies. It was the first of many laws designed to limit production and trade in America so the colonies would remain a captive market for England. In 1700, Massachusetts passed a law expelling all Catholic priests, and in 1714, tea was introduced to the American colonies. James passed away in 1725.

### **Samuel Wright, 1674 to 1734**

Samuel Wright was born in Northampton, Massachusetts in 1674. He married Rebecca Sykes in Northampton in 1697 and the two of them had eight children – James, Lydia, Samuel, Preserved, Nathaniel, Ebenezer, Esther, and Benoni.

Towards the end of Samuel's life came the "First Great Awakening," a period of intense religious interest and zeal in America. It was begun, in large part, by Jonathon Edwards, one of America's most important theologians, author of *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, and the originator of the fire-and-brimstone sermon ubiquitous to religious revivals in America. Edwards was born in East Windsor, Connecticut, but he preached at the Congregational Church in Northampton and conducted his first revival meetings there. Later on, he toured all thirteen colonies in America, preaching his brand of reformed determinism and ethical fitness. The Great Awakening, as shaped by Edwards and others like him, was a defining moment in the development of the national American character.

It's not known whether Samuel Wright ever heard Jonathon Edwards preach, or if he subscribed to Edward's intense and unforgiving theology. At some point, Samuel moved his family to Lebanon, Connecticut and died there in 1734.

### **Benoni Wright, 1719 to 1761**

Benoni Wright was born in Lebanon, Connecticut in 1719 and seems to have been unaffected by the Great Awakening, at least in his youth. He was high-spirited and had at least one brush with the law. An old family document recorded that "he played crazy in the hills and was soundly thrashed by the town officers." Other remembrances label him an "original character" and "lively fellow." Fortunately for the Wright lineage, he settled down long enough to get married. Benoni Wright and Elizabeth (Eliza Betsy) Smith tied the knot in 1742 in Lebanon, CT. They had five children – Samuel, Theodora, Dan, Esther, and Benoni. The last son was born after Benoni's death in 1761, which may explain why he was named after his father. His mother, Eliza Betsy Wright, called Benoni Jr. the "son of her sorrow." Benoni Sr. was just 42 years old when he passed away.

Benoni's Connecticut was deeply divided by the Great Awakening. The Congregational Church was the most powerful organization in the colony; the colonial government was

made up of “Old Lights” or conservative Congregational members. The Congregationalists that attended the religious revivals of the Great Awakening were the “New Lights” – liberals. The Old Lights discouraged revivals, even passed laws to prevent them. There is no clear indication which side Benoni supported, but it’s likely that as a rebellious youth, he chaffed at authority and would likely have aligned himself with the New Lights.

Late in Benoni’s life, the Seven Years War broke out, involving most of the major powers in Europe. It was oddly prescient of the World Wars of the twentieth century in that it involved not only Europe but also European colonies in the Americas and Asia. In the North American theater it is remembered as the French and Indian War. The British were the big winners in this conflict, capturing New France (Quebec) in the north and Spanish Florida in the South. Benoni did not fight, but his brothers Samuel and Ebenezer are listed on the rolls of Connecticut militia.

## ***On to Ohio circa 1800 CE***

### **Dan Wright Sr., 1757 to 1832**

Dan Wright was born in Lebanon, Connecticut in 1757 and lost his father when he was just 4 years old. He joined the Continental Army in 1777 and fought in the Revolutionary War. Family tradition records that he “engaged in many battles,” but perhaps the most important was the Battle of Saratoga in the autumn of 1777. It was at this battle that the American patriots under the command of Major General Horatio Gates forced the surrender of General John Burgoyne and the northern division of the British army. In doing so, they foiled a British plan to trap the Continental Army between three divisions of the British. Many historians cite this as the turning point when fortune finally began to favor the Americans in their War for Independence. The victory at Saratoga also convinced the French to ally with the new United States of America in opposition to England.

After the War, Dan settled near Hanover, Vermont, working as a carpenter and a farmer. In 1785, he married Sarah Freeman. She was the daughter of Colonel Edmund Freeman, another Continental soldier who had also participated in the Battle of Saratoga. Freeman had been part of the New Hampshire militia. Dan and Sarah had six children in Vermont – Asahel, Porter, Dan Jr., Sally (or Sarah), Elizabeth, and Samuel.

In 1814, Dan Sr. and his children decided to move to the new state of Ohio, possibly to escape the uncertainties of the War of 1812 which was raging in his neighborhood. The British were using Montreal as a staging area and attempting to move troops and supplies south through Vermont and upper state New York. A decisive engagement, the Battle of Lake Champlain, occurred not far from the Wright farm. Porter and Dan Jr. had left Hanover by this time and were living in the Genesee Valley south of Rochester – what is now known as the Finger Lakes district. Dan Sr. and the remaining family pulled up stakes, made a short stop in Genesee Valley to pick up Porter and Dan Jr., and moved to Ohio. They first settled in Centerville, just south of Dayton, where Dan Sr.’s son Asahel set up a general store and a small distillery. He also manufactured peppermint oil, which was used as a medicine and a tonic at that time. Dan Sr. was beginning to show his age and his children, especially Asahel, looked after him and Sarah. Asahel helped set up his

parents on a small farm west of Centerville. In 1826, there were reports that the National Road – the new nation’s first highway – would be passing north of Dayton. Asahel sold his holdings in Centerville, including the 25-acre farm where Dan Sr. lived, and moved the family to a farm in Bethel Township in Miami County, where the National Road would pass. There Asahel started another store. Construction of the National Road was slow, but it finally arrived in 1838, running along the northern property line of the Wright farm. Dan Sr. was deceased by this time, having passed away in 1832.

### **Dan Wright Jr., 1790 to 1861**

Dan Wright Jr. was born in Thetford , Vermont in 1790. He taught school in Vermont and then traveled to Genesee Valley, New York where he stayed with his brother Porter for a time. In 1814, Dan Jr. and Porter joined their father Dan Sr. and siblings Asahel, Elizabeth, Sarah, and Samuel as they emigrated to Ohio. While in Centerville, Ohio Dan Jr. worked in his brother Asahel’s distillery. He married Catherine Reeder in 1818 – Catharine was the daughter or Margaret (Van Cleve) Reeder, whose family were among the first settlers of Dayton, Ohio. They had two sons while still in Centerville – Samuel Smith and Harvey.

In 1821, Dan Jr. and his wife left Centerville for Indiana, The territory became a state in 1817 and a year later the Treaty of St. Mary's opened up vast tracts of land for settlement that had formerly belonged to the natives. Of immense importance to Dan Jr., Indiana became a free state in 1820 following the case of Polly vs. LaSalle which freed Indiana slaves from their masters. Dan and Catharine staked a farm in Richland Township, Rush County, and then moved to another Rush County farm in 1823, just a mile and a half southwest of their first Indiana home. Here, Catherine bore two more sons and a daughter, Milton, William and Sarah. There may have also been a son and a daughter who died in infancy, George and Kate. Throughout his life, Dan Jr. remained close to the extended Wright family and made numerous visits to his father, mother, brothers, and sister in Miami County, Ohio

Dan was a straight arrow who took his ethics seriously. Later in life, Milton Wright described his father as “grave in his countenance, collected in his manners, hesitating in his speech, but very accurate.” The early 1800s was the time of the Second Great Awakening, another burst of religious zeal and revival in America. Dan Jr. apparently got religion in 1830 and became a teetotaler – even though he had once worked in his brother’s distillery – and refused to sell his corn crop to distillers who would convert it to whiskey. Dan Jr. strongly supported the abolition of slavery and opposed the activities of secret fraternal societies such as the Masons. He apparently passed these beliefs on to his son Milton along with his love of family.

In 1840, Dan Jr. sold the second Rush County farm and moved to another just over the county line in Orange Township, Fayette County, Indiana. He died at this farm in 1861.

### **Bishop Milton Wright, 1828 to 1917**

Milton Wright was born in 1828 on his father’s farm in Rush County, Indiana. He was a studious youngster, and was encouraged in his studies by his two older brothers, Samuel Smith and Harvey. Like his father, he was influenced by the tail end of Second Great

Awakening and determined to lead a religious life in 1843. However, he did not formally join a church until 1847 when he became a United Brethren. The Church of the United Brethren was the first completely American religious sect and as such embodied many of the equalitarian principles of the new nation. It was especially popular in the Midwest and its unofficial headquarters were in Dayton, Ohio.

Milton moved quickly up the ranks. He took a supervisory position at Hartsville College (a United Brethren institution), was ordained a minister, served time as a missionary in the gold fields of Oregon, and then returned to Indiana to become a circuit preacher. He married Susan Koerner in 1859 and the two of them eventually had five children – Reuchlin, Lorin, Wilbur, Orville, and Katharine. There was also a set of twins, Otis and Ida, who died in infancy.

The Civil War loomed large in Milton's early life, but he did not fight even though he was unequivocally an abolitionist. He was also a pacifist, so much so that he would not preach to the troops. Strong opinions like these made Milton both an influential and controversial figure in the Church of the United Brethren. His career required that he move his family often. They lived in three different locations in Indiana before Milton was appointed the editor of the church newspaper in 1869 and moved to Dayton, Ohio where the United Brethren maintained their printing house. In 1877, he was appointed Bishop of the United Brethren churches between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains, and moved his family to Cedar Rapids, Iowa. In 1881, he was called back east to become a circuit preacher once more and he deposited his family in Richmond, Indiana. In 1884 he moved the family for the last time, taking them back to Dayton where he could be closer to and more involved in church politics. In 1889, the Church of the United Brethren split along conservative and liberal lines and Milton became a Bishop of the conservatives, the Church of the United Brethren, Old Constitution.

That same year, his wife Susan died of tuberculosis. Reuchlin and Lorin had already left home – Reuchlin to start his own family and Lorin to see if he could make a go of it on the Kansas frontier. Wilbur, Orville, and Katharine remained. While Milton was building a new church, his two younger sons started a printing business, a newspaper, and a bicycle shop. Katharine attended Oberlin College, and then taught at Steele High School in Dayton. About the time that Orville and Wilbur began demonstrating their airplanes, Bishop Milton Wright was forcibly retired from his church over a disagreement on whether or not to prosecute a Brethren who had misappropriated church funds. Milton lived to see his younger sons achieve international fame for the invention of the first practical airplane, and then died in 1917.

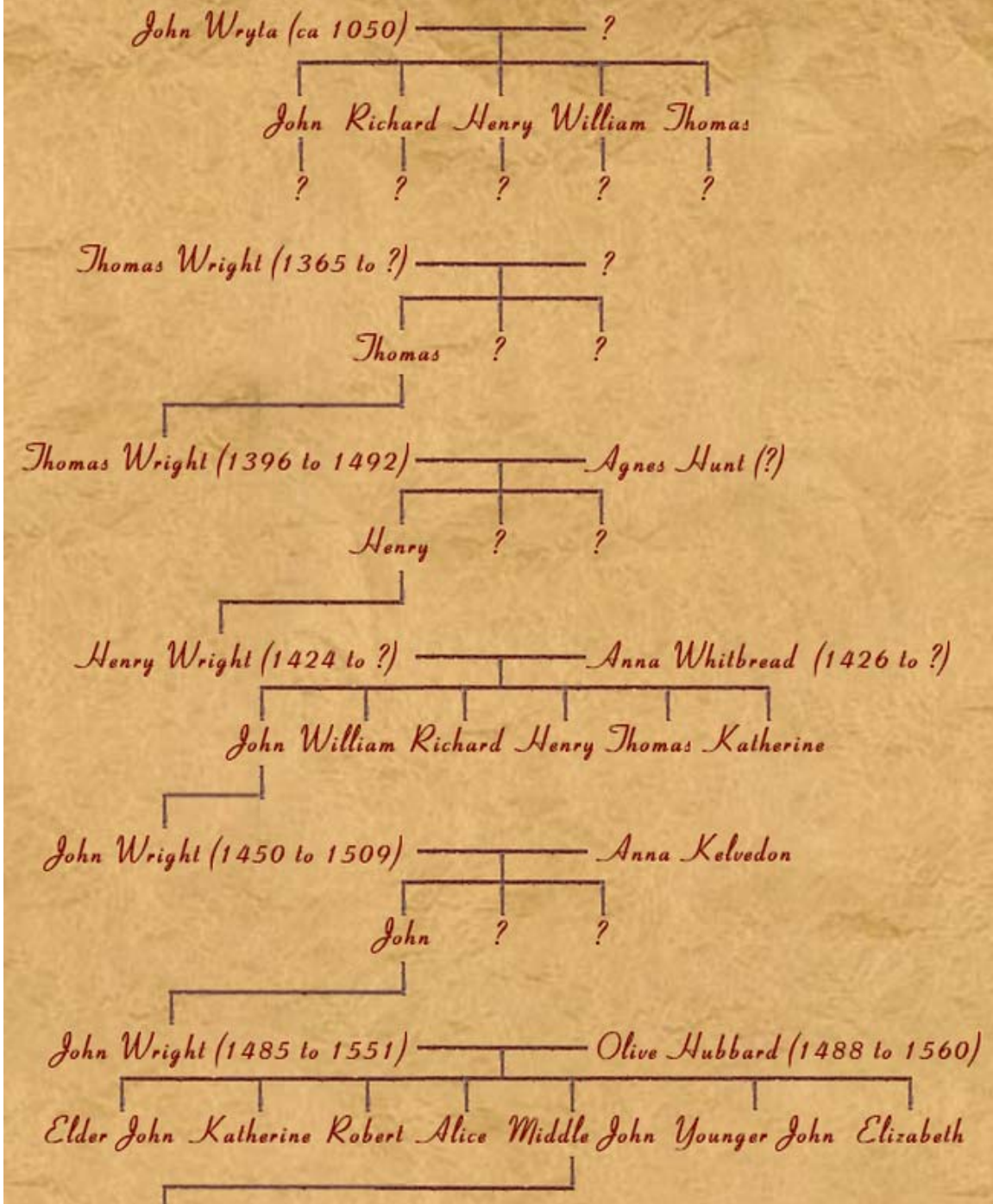
For Wilbur, Orville, and Katharine, this was the end of their genealogical line. Nether brother married or fathered any children. Katharine married late in her life, but she had no offspring. Older brothers Reuchlin and Lorin, however, married and had sons and daughters. The ancient Wryta lineage continues through their progeny and many others.

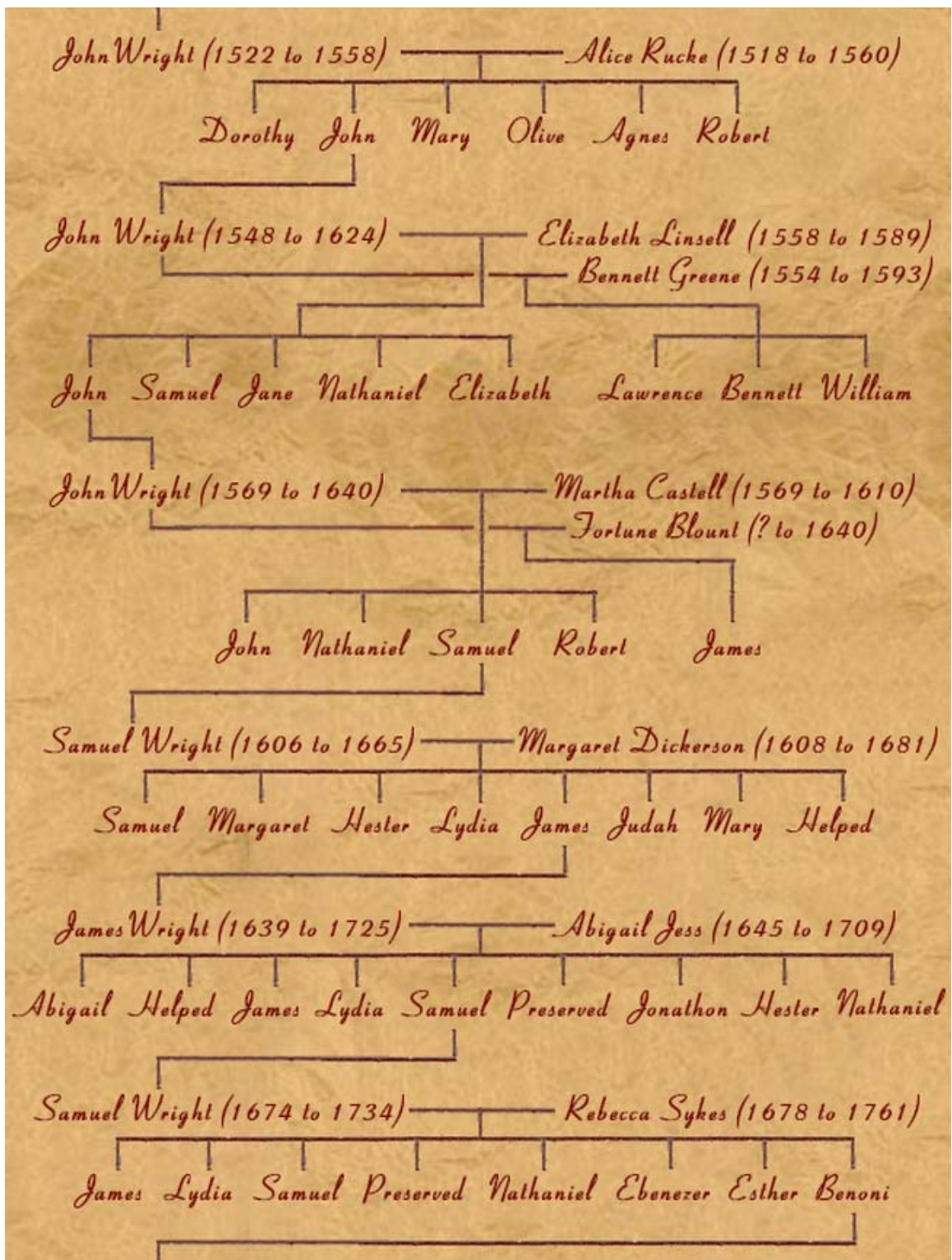
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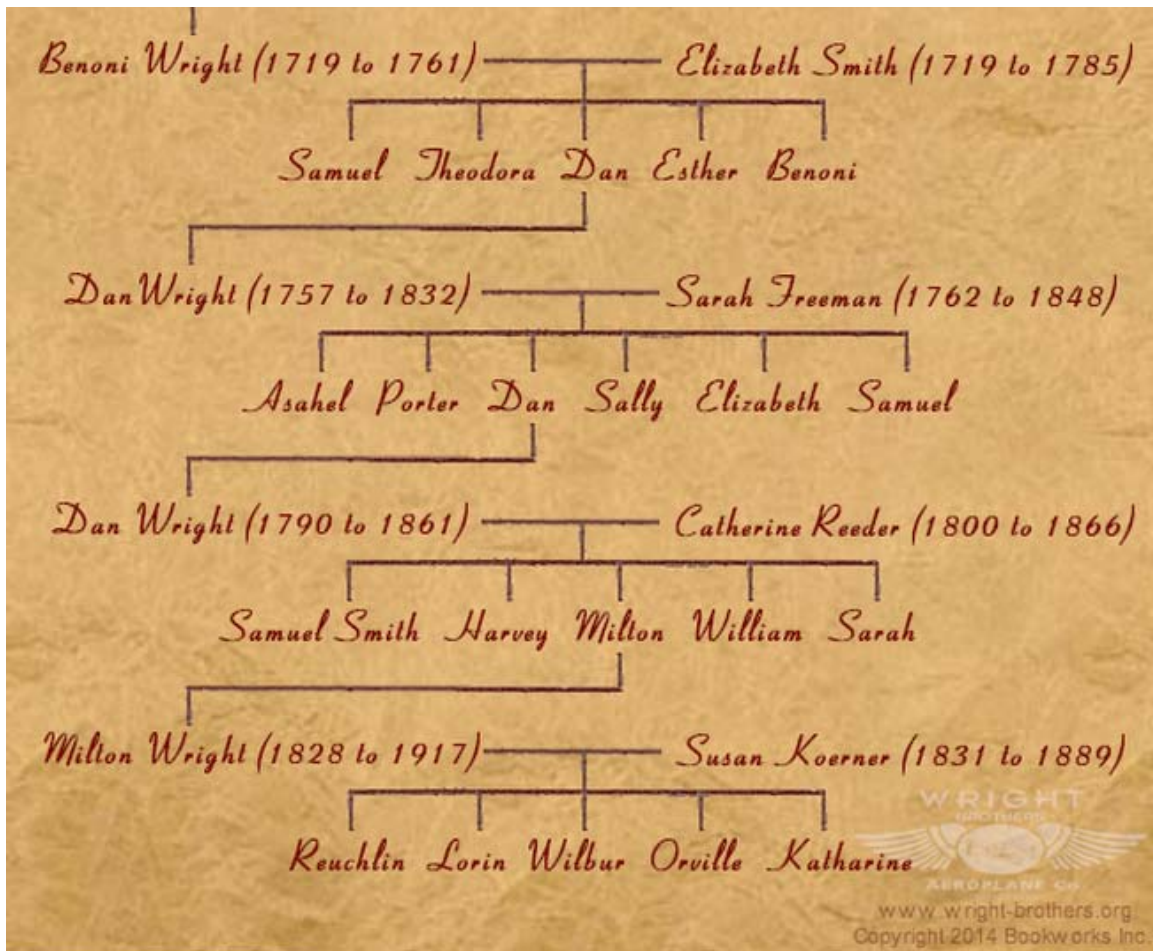
[Wright Brothers Aeroplane Company](#)

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# A Genealogy of the Wright Family





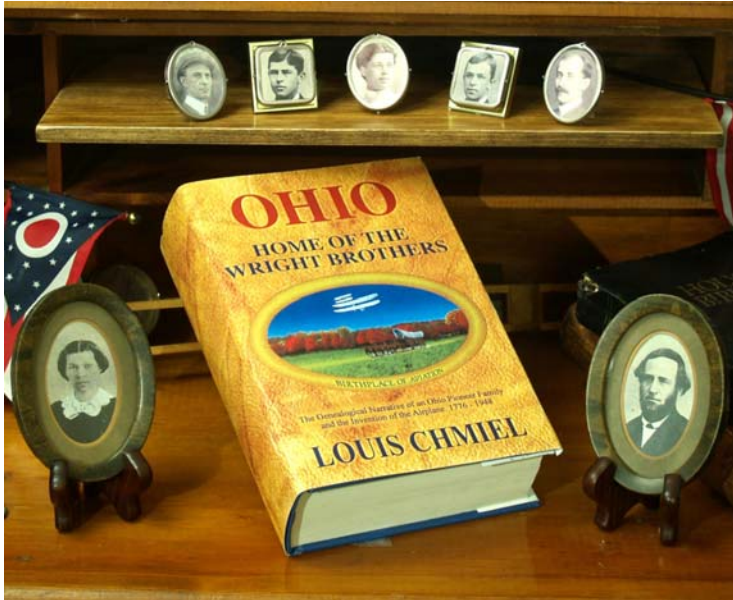


If you would like to know more about the history and genealogy of the Wright family in America, you can find it in:

## Ohio, Home of the Wright Brothers

The genealogical chronicle of an Ohio pioneer family and the invention of the airplane.

By Louis Chmiel



*Ohio, Home of the Wright Brothers* by Louis Chmiel follows the ancestry of the Wright brothers from the Revolutionary War in 1776, through the settling of the Northwest Territory in 1790, Ohio statehood in 1803, the development of the National Road through the 1820's and 1830's, the Civil War in the 1860s, on through the post Civil War births of Wilbur and Orville Wright. The author traces five families who settle in southwestern Ohio and develop an energetic

forward-looking civilization founded on technology and democracy. You come to know Orville and Wilbur as the sons of sons of pioneers and revolutionaries. The brothers grow up in a culture of invention where friends and relations file patents and forge livings from their own ingenuity. Nurtured by strong-willed, educated and supportive parents, the boys land in Dayton, Ohio, ground zero for the Second Industrial Revolution.

Lou Chmiel's book is an intimate history of the American heartland and the people who wrestled it from the wilderness, all the while nurturing a fragile experiment in self-government. It is a genealogy of some of the first families to settle the Midwest and a valuable resource for anyone interested in this heritage. Chmiel's research is meticulous and his scope is profound. Whether you read *Ohio, Home of the Wright Brothers* for pleasure or reference, it will be well worth the effort every time you open its covers.

You can purchase *Ohio, Home of the Wright Brothers* for \$44.95, plus \$5.00 shipping and handling to the 48 contiguous United States.\* The book is available online at [Wright Brothers Ancestry](#). Or you can write the author:

Louis Chmiel  
1022 Carlisle Ave.  
Dayton, OH 45420

\*As of May, 2014. Prices may change. Customers outside the 48 contiguous U.S. please inquire.