



Carolinas Aviation Museum
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Humans have been fascinated with taking flight for hundreds of years. From Leonardo DaVinci's flying machines to Howard Hughes' cutting edge engineering breakthroughs we have always obsessed over the idea of soaring with the birds. With North Carolina's history in avionic firsts the Carolinas Aviation Museum is a must see for residents and visitors alike. The museum began simply enough in 1991 as a small group of enthusiasts that banded together to save two historic aircraft hangars on the grounds of the Charlotte-Douglas International Airport. When Floyd and Lois Wilson found out the two hangars were slated for demolition they quickly began discussing how to save them. One of the hangars was especially significant as it had been an original facility for Southeast Airways at Charlotte's very first municipal airport and was built in 1936-37.

The Wilsons quickly gathered twenty interested members and began working to save the hangar. First they agreed on a name for their newly formed group: Carolinas Historic Aviation Commission, or C.H.A.C. In February of 1992 the group became incorporated for the purpose of preserving the past, present and future aviation history of North and South Carolina and by September the commission acquired their first airplane, a North American T-28B Trojan, a propeller plane retired from the U.S. Army. Looking for a place to store their new prize they received temporary storage space from the Charlotte Airport Director Jerry Orr. In early 1993 CHAC found a permanent home for their aircraft in the very same dilapidated hangar they had set out to save. The almost 60 year old hangar was in bad shape but eventually, with a little TLC, it became the home of the Carolinas Aviation Museum.

More recently the museum has moved to a new hangar, the original southeast airways facility is only about 10,000 square feet of space leaving most of the museum's exhibits outside and exposed to the elements. The move was required so that the FAA could use the area to extend the airport runway. However the 1937 airport hangar is now a historic building and will not be torn down, once all the plans are finalized the airport will find a new place to relocate the building. The new facility was the corporate hangar for Wachovia and boasts

40,000 square feet, enough room for more planes to be moved inside the hangar. The Carolinas Aviation Museum displays all manner of aviation history from a reproduction of the Wright Brothers' Glider to helicopters to military and commercial airplanes. Ever wonder what it's like to sit in the cockpit of a genuine fighter jet? Wonder no more 'Top Gun' the museum has that too!

The newest addition to the museum's grand collection of aircraft is an Airbus A320. But this plane is not just any Airbus, no this plane was Flight 1549 which was emergency ditched on the Hudson river in early 2009 after taking off en route to Charlotte-Douglas Airport. Now known as the "Miracle on the Hudson" all 155 people aboard flight 1549 (many of them Charlotte residents) escaped the craft relatively unharmed thanks to the experience and ingenuity of Captain "Sully" Sullenberger. The airframe of the plane was rescued from the river, cleaned up and sent to the Aviation Museum as a donation from the aircraft's insurance company. Arriving in Charlotte in early June of this year the plane is set to be preserved as a permanent feature at the museum, a grand opening of the exhibit is planned for January of 2012, the three year anniversary of the 'miracle' river landing.

The Carolinas Aviation Museum makes an effort to obtain aircraft that are important to flying history in the Carolinas. Planes and helicopters that were based in and flew to and from North and South Carolina show a living history of avionics in our region. Through wartime and the passenger air travel boom the museum captures the glory of man's victory over gravity and is a must see for the whole family. The museum's two interactive exhibits travel to air shows and events as well as being on display at the facility. Many of the crafts are fully restored, some are considered still flyable and several of the military 'choppers' and planes are combat veterans.

The museum is open Monday-Friday 10am-4pm and 10am-5pm on Saturdays. Admission is \$11 for adults with special pricing for seniors, students and active military members, children under 6 are free. Groups are welcome with reservations and discounts are available for groups of ten or more. Museum membership is open to anyone interested in preserving aviation history, details can be found by phone or at the museum website.