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Humanity's desire to fly possibly first found expression in China, where people flying tied to kites is recorded (as a punishment) from the 6th century.

Subsequently, the first glider flight was demonstrated by Abbas Ibn Firnas in al-Andalus in the 9th century. Leonardo da Vinci's 15th century dream of flight found expression in several designs, but he did not attempt to demonstrate flight. It was in Europe during the late 18th century that serious attempts at flight would first take place.

The Wright brothers made the first sustained, controlled, powered heavier-than-air manned flight at Kill Devil Hills, N.C., four miles south of Kitty Hawk, N.C., on Dec. 17, 1903.

The years between World War I and World War II saw great advancements in aircraft technology. Aeroplanes evolved from low-powered biplanes made from wood and fabric to sleek, high-powered monoplanes made of aluminum. The age of the great airships came and went.

The U.S. Army Air Corps trained B-24 bomber crews at Liberal Army Airfield during World War II, and when the base closed after the war ended, the people of Liberal needed to put the old airstrip to use.



The war had introduced the idea of airplane use to the nation on a widespread basis, and in the years following the hostilities, companies that had produced aircraft for the military scrambled to capture a piece of the growing civilian market.

For a time, Beech Aircraft made planes at the old airbase in Liberal.

After Beech closed down their plant, the people in Liberal realized they had an opportunity to preserve their aviation heritage. Thus, the Mid-America Air Museum was born.

A group of local citizens founded MAAM in 1987. The concept was the result of a reunion of bomber group personnel who had been stationed at Liberal during World War II.

Countless hours of volunteer labor went into making the museum a reality. One of the driving forces behind MAAM was Col. Tom Thomas of Ada, Okla.

As a P-40 pilot during World War II, Thomas flew 86 combat missions and shot down six enemy aircraft, before being shot down and captured in Sicily.

Thomas was awarded the Air Medal, Distinguished Flying Cross and the Silver Star for his efforts. Thomas loaned nearly 70 classic airplanes from his private collection to MAAM and willed them to the City of Liberal upon his death in 1998. Today, the museum is the fifth largest airplane museum in the country.

The museum is currently home to more than 100 aircraft, including military, homebuilts, hang gliders and ultra-lights situated around interactive displays, including the Korean War and the 1942 raid on Tokyo by General Jimmy Doolittle.

MAAM features guided tours, which are available for groups of 10 or more at special rates. Admission is \$7 for adults and \$3 for ages 6-18. Group tours must be booked in advance. Electric carts are available at no additional charge for those requiring mobility assistance.

The museum also offers Camp Falcon, a seven-week summer educational program for children ages 8 to 12, where campers can learn about the history of flight, the scientific principles behind flight, perform experiments, make models and conduct test flights.

Another annual event at MAAM is Command Performance. When Command Performance

premiered in 2005, the show saluted the USO with comedy and music from World War II to the present.

In 2006, the Kansas National Guard was honored with a 1940s theme that portrayed canteens of the World War II era.

Last year, the program recognized Korean War veterans and featured talent from the 1950s.

The fourth annual installment of the Mid-America Air Museum special event Command Performance paid tribute to Vietnam veterans.

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