Today as we place the cornerstone of another splendid building devoted to education in the City of Dayton Ohio, and give to it the honored and beloved name of Wilbur Wright, it seems appropriate to recall a remark made by this famous man during the first early days when aviation was very new. A friend asked, “How did you feel as you looked down on the earth so far beneath you?”

His reply was, “It seemed as though everyone was walking stoop-shouldered with his eyes fastened on the ground. I wanted to call down, ‘Look up! Look up!’” A motto indeed to be inscribed appropriately on the cornerstone of any school building.

Although Dayton claims the “Wright boys” as her own sons, the actual birthplace of Wilbur was about eight miles east of Newcastle, Indiana, the date being the 16th of April 1867. As far as ancestry and permanent location is concerned, however, he belongs emphatically to Dayton.

It was late in the afternoon of 1878 that their father brought home a toy which he proceeded to toss into the air where the odd piece of mechanism flew across the room. This little toy, which the children dubbed “the bat,” was a helicopter, and became, as a current professor of aeronautics puts it, “the first spark that lit the fire of genius.”

Although much experimenting had been done in the years preceding the date when Wilbur and Orville worked out their tables calculating air pressure on various surfaces, many had been killed in such trials and the public, discouraged by failures and tragedies, considered flight beyond the reach of men, classing its followers with the experimenters in perpetual motion.

It was here the Wright boys showed their greatness of soul by disregarding public opinion. Soon they found no interest, no encouragement from their fellow citizens, little from their neighbors and less from their friends. Everyone said, “They are simply wasting their time. Too bad, such fine young men.”

On this lovely strip of sand – known as Kill Devil Hill at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina – they carried on their experiments for three years beginning in 1900. Then, on Dec. 17, 1903, before the eyes of five witnesses besides the Wrights, the first heavier-than-air machine raised itself from the earth by its own power in a flight lasting twelve seconds, and sailed forward, landing at a point as high as the one from which it started. Before the day was over, the machine had been in the air fifty-nine seconds, after they had acquired more skill in handling it.

What we say of Wilbur Wright must be said of Orville. They shared equally the early struggles – the final success and the world’s honor as the joint inventors of the first heavier-than-air machine capable of sustained flight. More perhaps than ever this they have forever demonstrated that nothing is impossible to the pioneer spirit of young America, for whose betterment we are placing this cornerstone in the Wilbur Wright School today.”

- Excerpted from a written history by Agnes Osborn Beck, found in the original Wilbur Wright School cornerstone.