

# Sublimity has claim to Wrights' fame

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SUBLIMITY — This tiny Willamette Valley community is a long way from the windy dunes of North Carolina where the Wright brothers made their famous flight 100 years ago Wednesday.

In a far-off way, however, it played its part.

The Wrights' father, Milton Wright, by most accounts a dour taskmaster, was the first teacher and president of Sublimity College, founded in 1857 by the United Brethren Church.

The connection is remote, but it's still a matter of pride in the small town southeast of Salem.

"Maybe some new folks don't know, but I can't imagine," said Doug Denson, former mayor of Sublimity. "Most people who've been around know the story."

Denson once tried to put up a monument to Milton Wright, but the City Council rejected it. "There's a piece of history we ought to record someplace," he said.

Milton Wright taught for about two years at the college, which was more of a glorified grade school, though quite upscale for those pre-statehood days. He was 29 when he moved to Sublimity as an ordained minister.

Wright was described as a strict

disciplinarian in the book "Sublimity: The Story of an Oregon Countryside."

For years after he left, the town was noted for "its peacefulness and purity of morals," a successor wrote.

He went back to Indiana in 1859 and eventually became a bishop.

Wilbur and Orville Wright were among his five children.

In 1871, about the time Orville was born, Milton scoffed at the notion that man could fly. "Blasphemy! Utter blasphemy! God intends only his angels to fly," one printed version quotes him as saying.

It took more than 30 years, but the boys showed him how wrong he could be.

It may have started with a gift he gave them, a toy helicopter of cork, bamboo and paper that was activated by a twisted rubber band.

"We were lucky enough to grow up in an environment where there was always much encouragement to children to pursue intellectual interests, to investigate whatever aroused curiosity," Orville wrote.

But it was their mother who had the mechanical genes. It was she the brothers consulted when they needed mechanical assistance or advice.

Still, the town of 2,400 hasn't forgotten the father.

"Sublimity's big claim to fame was the college, and he taught there," said Sue Bernt, city recorder. "To me, it's an interesting bit of trivia."