

Bishop Milton Wright was a many-dimensional person: warm, stubborn, brilliant, principled, polarizing, gracious, imperialistic, litigious, uncompromising. Though conservative in most ways, he was a huge proponent of women's rights.

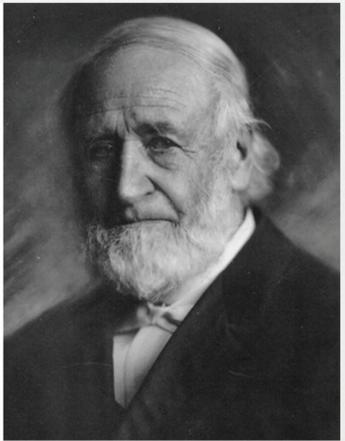
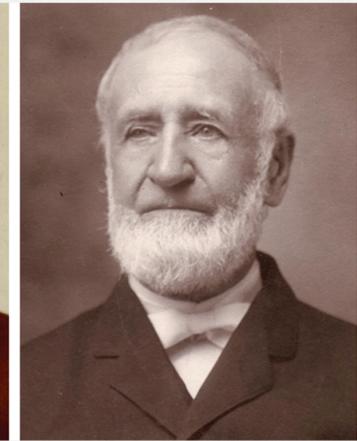
Most definitely, Milton Wright was a leader. And this is certain: without Milton Wright, there would be no United Brethren Church today.

Milton Wright was converted around 1848, and preached his first sermon in 1850. Over the years he served UB churches and colleges in Indiana, Ohio, Iowa, and Oregon. He was the first president of Sublimity College in Oregon, and was instrumental in founding the first UB school for training ministers, Union Biblical Seminary, in 1871. He spent eight years, 1869-1877, as editor of *The Religious Telescope*, the weekly UB newspaper. That got his name before people.

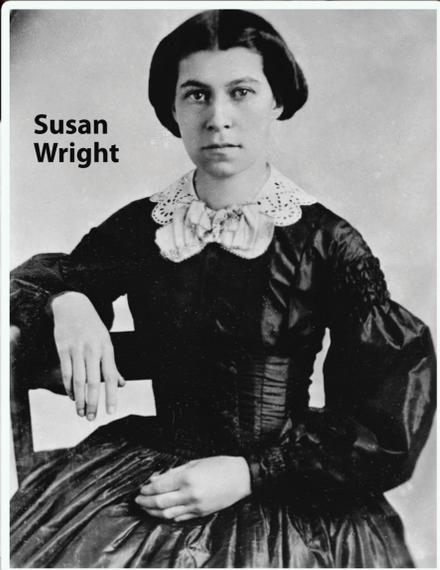
Wright was elected bishop in 1877, but wasn't re-elected in 1881. Thinking the church was going liberal, he founded what became *The Christian Conservator* newspaper as a counter-balance to *The Religious Telescope*. And he made a lot of waves. He was elected bishop again in 1885, but was assigned to the West Coast, which got him out of the way and marginalized his influence.

Controversial decisions at the 1889 General Conference prompted Wright and 15,000 sympathizers (called Radicals) to leave the quarter-million-strong United Brethren denomination. The other group (called Liberals) went through a couple mergers and, in 1967, was absorbed into what is now the United Methodist Church. But thanks to Milton Wright, the United Brethren name, and its legacy, endures.

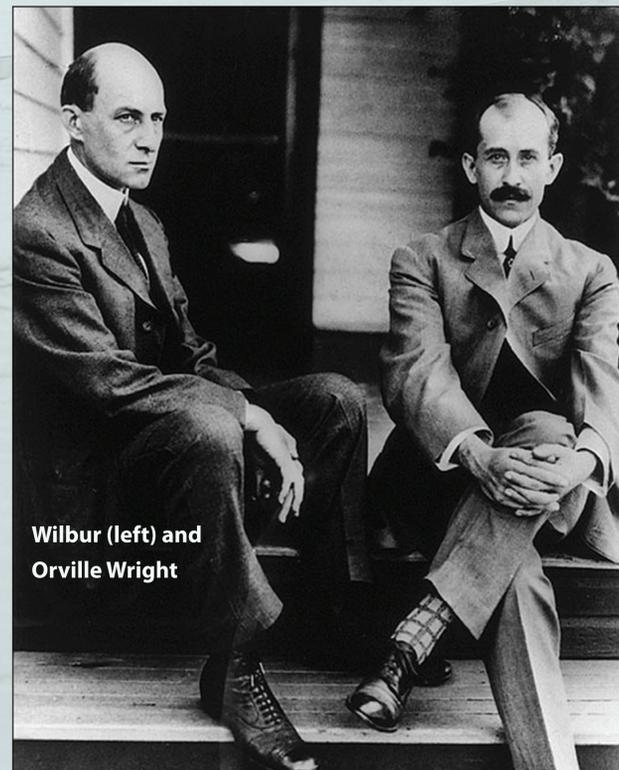
Those 15,000 people lost their church properties and had to start from scratch. Under Wright's leadership, they rebuilt — new church buildings, a publishing house, a college, a missions program, a headquarters...everything. In 1905, less than two years after sons Orville and Wilbur had become world famous at Kitty Hawk, Milton stepped down as bishop and entered retirement.



# Milton Wright



Susan Wright



Wilbur (left) and Orville Wright

There are stories of Orville and Wilbur teaching Sunday school, but they weren't generally church-going guys. They helped their father in his lawsuits and other controversies, but otherwise didn't get much involved in the church.

In 1944, Clyde Meadows and Elmer Becker traveled to Dayton to visit Orville, who was then 73. They spent nearly four hours talking about airplanes.

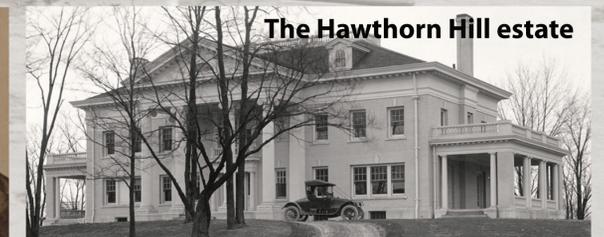
At the time, German cities were being devastated in Allied bombing raids, which killed tens of thousands of people. Meadows asked Orville how he felt about his invention being used to cause so much destruction.

Orville replied, "I've thought about this a lot. The airplane was due. If Wilbur and I hadn't developed it, someone else would have. But that is poor consolation. I take comfort in knowing that Wilbur and I gave the airplane to the world in good faith. You can't withhold a good gift just because someone might misuse it. In that case, God would have to withhold life itself."

In 1910, Orville asked his father, then 81, if he wanted to take a ride in an airplane. Milton did. The flight, at Huffman Prairie outside of Dayton, lasted just under seven minutes. Orville, afraid of how his elderly father would react at being so high above the ground, levelled off at 350 feet. He needn't have been concerned. Milton leaned close to Orville's ear and shouted above the roar of the engine, "Higher, Orville, higher!"



Katherine was Milton's only daughter.

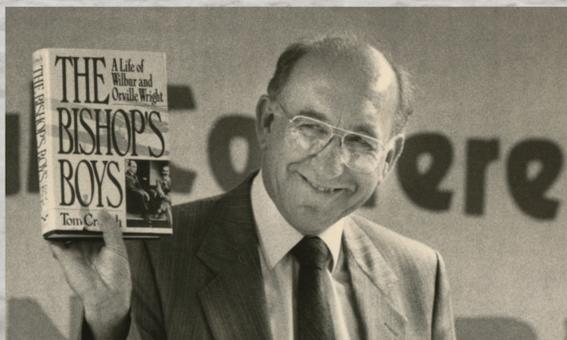


The Hawthorn Hill estate

Milton and Susan met in 1851 as students at Hartsville College in southern Indiana, near where Milton grew up. They were married in 1859. He was 31, she 28. They had four sons and a daughter, plus twins who died in 1870 soon after birth. The youngest sons were Wilbur, born in 1867, and Orville, born in 1871. Both were named after ministers whom their father admired.

Milton buried Susan in 1889, six weeks after the tumultuous General Conference. Wilbur died in 1912 of typhoid fever. In 1914, Milton left the home in Dayton, Ohio, where he had lived for 40 years, and moved into Orville's new Hawthorn Hill mansion in Dayton.

On April 2, 1917, Milton read the evening paper, did some writing at his desk, talked to daughter Katherine for a while, and went to bed. The next morning, he didn't come down for breakfast. They found him in his bed, as if asleep.



Bishop C. Ray Miller used the newly-published *The Bishop's Boys* in his address to the 1989 General Conference, urging the church, "Let's go higher, brethren, higher."