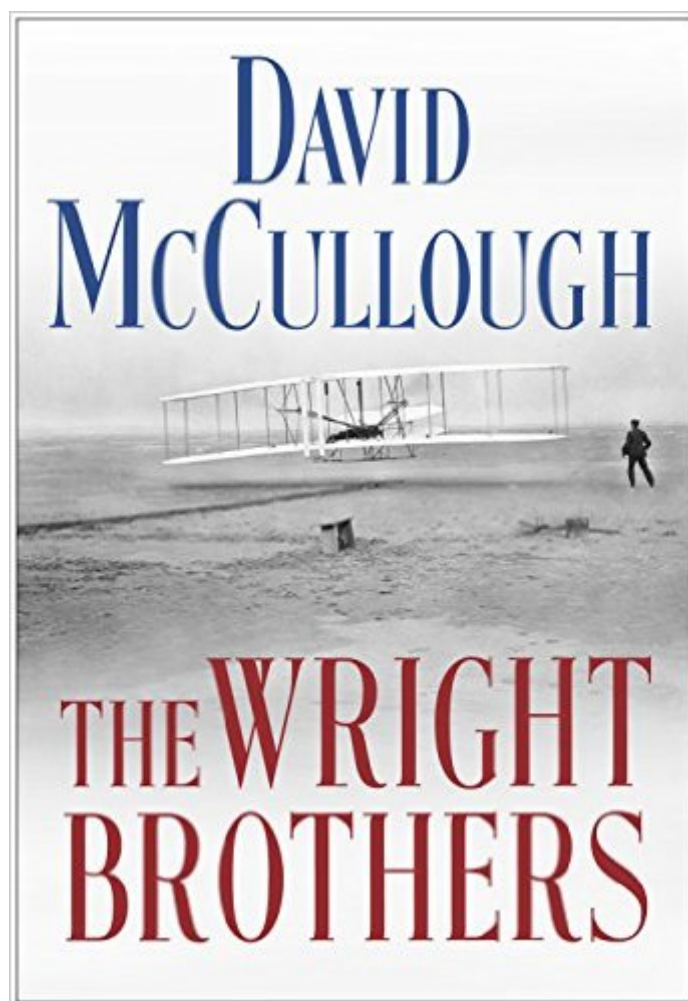


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The Wright Brothers (Thorndike Press Large Print Popular And Narrative Nonfiction Series)



Synopsis

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Customer Reviews

David McCullough is one of the preeminent American historians of our times, the deft biographer of John Adams and Harry Truman, and in this book he brings his wonderful historical exposition and storytelling skills to the lives of the Wright brothers. So much is known about these men that they have been turned into legends. Legends they were but they were also human, and this is the quality that McCullough is best at showcasing in these pages. The book is a quick and fun read. If I have some minor reservations they are only in the lack of technical detail which could have informed descriptions of some of the Wrights' experiments and the slightly hagiographical tint that McCullough is known to bring to his subjects. I would also have appreciated some more insights into attempts that other people around the world were making in enabling powered flight. Nevertheless, this is after all a popular work, and popular history seldom gets better than under McCullough's pen. The book shines in three aspects. Firstly McCullough who is quite certainly one of the best storytellers among all historians does a great job of giving us the details of the Wrights' upbringing and family. He drives home the importance of the Wrights' emphasis on simplicity, intellectual hunger and plain diligence, hard work and determination. The Wright brothers' father who was a Bishop filled the house with books and learning and never held back their intellectual curiosity. This

led to an interest in tinkering in the best sense of the tradition, first with bicycles and then with airplanes.

McCullough has written a serious and riveting review of the lives of Wilbur and Orville. His writing style is concise, thorough, and unpretentious. I was able to read it easily and enjoyably and learned many things about the Wright family that I didn't know. The book was thus valuable to me. McCullough makes it clear that the Wilbur and Orville were a product of their family environment. Their father was the major influence. Milton Wright was a minister and finally a bishop in the United Brethren Church in Christ. McCullough writes "He was an unyielding abstainer, which was rare on the frontier, a man of rectitude and purpose" all of which could have served as a description of Milton himself and Wilbur and Orville as well. His strict values molded and focused the views of the three younger Wrights (Katherine, Wilbur, and Orville). In addition to his strictness, he was a true classical liberal in his beliefs in the scientific method and equal rights for all people, no matter their race or gender. For example, Milton wrote to his sons when they were in Paris trying to get support for their flying machine: "Sons Be men of the highest types personally, mentally, morally, and spiritually. Be clean, temperate, sober minded, and great souled. As grown, experienced, and highly successful inventors, they responded: "Father " All the wine I have tasted since leaving home would not fill a single wine glass. I am sure that Orville and myself will do nothing that will disgrace the training we received from you and Mother. McCullough writes " Years later, a friend told Orville that he and his brother would always stand as an example of how far Americans with no special advantages could advance in the world.

THE WRIGHT BROTHERS is an easy to read, exciting story about the men (and the woman!) at the forefront of aviation. David McCullough weaves a fun tale exploring the competition to accomplish the first flight. It's a story of hardship, dedication, and scientific research by mechanics without even a college education. Wilbur and Orville Wright accomplished for about \$1000 what the director of the Smithsonian museum had just crashed into the Potomac River for \$70,000. Perhaps the most notable feature of this book is the detail and research evident. As an example of the author's persistent research, the author is now credited with solving the infamous "hockey stick incident." There has long been a mystery about the villain who smacked Wilbur in the face with a hockey stick. The author finally resolves this mystery, finding a diary entry pointing to the actual villain. It turns out that the culprit was a ne'er-do well named Oliver Crook Haugh. In fact, Haugh was later executed for murdering his own family. The significance of the hockey stick incident is this: It caused depression

so severe that Wilbur remained mostly home-ridden. As a result, he became a voracious reader; more importantly, Wilbur and Orville become closer, ultimately teaming them as business partners together. Of course, this meant a printing press business, followed by a bike shop, followed by airplane inventors/mechanics. The author explains the rejection of the brothers by the American government, while France wholeheartedly embraced and encouraged the men. American officials expressed no interest (at first, that is.) Even when a prominent senator encouraged the government to investigate, nothing happened. McCullough emphasizes the mechanical skill and research of the two.

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