



America by Air

How the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum is using the latest scholarship and exhibit techniques to interpret the history of technology and business.

New exhibit features the oldest and newest technologies to tell the story of U.S. air transport at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum



America by Air: A New Exhibit on the History of the U.S. Airline Industry

When the National Air and Space Museum (NASM) opened in 1976 it had 22 galleries open to the public. One of these galleries, the Hall of Air Transportation featured objects from the airline industry and its technology including a Ford 5-AT Tri-Motor, Boeing 247-D, and a Douglas DC-3. Because of budget limitations and the pressure to open on time, very little of the story of the American airline history was actually mentioned, much less interpreted through an historian's eye.

In 1997, NASM recognized the galleries shortcomings and began work to create a new scholarly, interpretive exhibit. By this time the museum had matured and was now open to new exhibits featuring complex interpretations of artifacts and events. A decade later, the result was the new America by Air gallery which tells the complex story of the U.S. airline industry in an engaging manner through innovative design and interactives yet rests on a solid intellectual foundation.



Author

Dr. F. Robert van der Linden is the Chairman of the Aeronautics Division of the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum. He is also Curator of Air Transportation and Special Purpose Aircraft. He is the responsible curator for the Milestones of Flight gallery, the Hall of Air Transportation and the Golden Age of Flight gallery as well as the author of seven books.

Dr. van der Linden holds a B.A. degree in History from the University of Denver, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Modern American, Business, and Military History from The George Washington University. He has been with the Smithsonian since 1977.