

American Institute of
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HISTORIC AEROSPACE SITE



***Delta Air Lines
Headquarters***

Atlanta, Georgia



Delta Air Lines World Headquarters in Atlanta, 1947.

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ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Marie Force and Tiffany Meng
Delta Air Transport Museum



C.E. Woolman, 1889–1966

Collett Everman (C.E.) Woolman was an aviation pioneer whose career spanned the history of flight from Jennys to jets. As principal founder of Delta Air Lines, he led its steady growth from the world's first crop-dusting company to a firm place of leadership among the nation's scheduled airlines.

[Note: Corrections made to this section in 2019.] He was born in Bloomington, Indiana on October 8, 1889, and attended high school in Urbana, Illinois. He attended the University of Illinois and graduated with a BS degree in agricultural engineering and an interest in aviation. He learned to fly an OX5 Jenny airplane, and went to work for the Agricultural Extension Department of Louisiana State University. From there, he observed an entomologist named B.R. Coad battling the boll weevil, devastating to the cotton economy at the time. Coad believed that the most effective treatment was to "dust" the crops from the air. From the USDA's Delta Laboratory in Tallulah, La., he borrowed planes and pilots from the Army

to help in designing dusting equipment and conduct experiments.

George Post, an aircraft manufacturer, observed the dusting experiments and was so impressed that he convinced the management of Huff Daland Manufacturing Company at Ogdensburg, New York, to form a separate crop dusting division, Huff Daland Dusters, in Georgia. Woolman was hired by the new company to perform entomological work, and became vice president and field manager. In 1924 the headquarters moved to Monroe, Louisiana, and Woolman became General Manager. At the time, the company's fleet of 18 planes was the largest privately-owned aircraft fleet in the world.

In 1929, Woolman convinced a group of Monroe businessmen at home to buy the Monroe dusting division from the parent company. The company name became Delta Air Service, for the Mississippi delta region it served. Woolman was named vice president and operations manager. In 1929, he was named vice president and general manager, and in 1930, was named to the company's board of directors.

The company purchased three five-passenger, 90 mile-per-hour Travel Air monoplanes, and on June 17, 1929, Delta operated its first passenger flight from Dallas, Texas, to Jackson, Mississippi, with stops at Shreveport and Monroe. In 1934 Delta was awarded an airmail contract stretching from Fort Worth to Charleston.

In 1945, Woolman was named president and general manager of Delta Air Lines. He had a genuine concern for each of his employees. As his company grew, it caused him considerable dismay that he could no longer remember each employee by name, and this intense relationship was mutual. Woolman was named chairman of the board and chief executive officer on November 1, 1965. After his death on September 11, 1966, Delta's employees completely reconditioned a 1925 Huff Daland Duster and presented it to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., as a memorial to the early days of the airline industry and the dedicated leader who helped shape its development.

In 1941, Delta Air Lines was a young airline, outgrowing its roots in agricultural aviation and the Mississippi Delta region where it started. Corporate headquarters were located in Monroe, Louisiana, where aviation pioneer C.E. Woolman and a group of investors had formed Delta Air Service in 1928, from crop-dusting company Huff Daland Dusters. Delta became the first passenger airline serving the “Deep South” in 1929, between Dallas, Texas, and Jackson, Mississippi, and entered Atlanta in 1930. After earning an airline contract in 1934, Delta flew west to Fort Worth, Texas, and east to Charleston, South Carolina. By the late 1930s, passenger and mail operations brought in higher revenues than crop-dusting operations. Delta had passed from the pioneering stage into a growing airline.

In 1936, as its route expanded eastward, Delta moved its flight operations office and maintenance shops to Atlanta, housing them in a hangar leased from Eastern Airlines. By early 1941, over half of Delta employees were based in Atlanta, as the city became increasingly important to Delta’s growth.

At that time, Atlanta had one of the nation’s oldest municipal airfields. Known as Candler Field, it was developing into the hub of aviation in the Southeast. Eastern Airlines, based in Miami, Florida, operated the majority of flights in and out of Atlanta, flying as far north as New York City and Chicago. Recent improvements to the airport, after “air-minded” William B. Hartsfield became Atlanta’s mayor in 1937, included better lighting and an expanded administration building topped by a control tower. An extensive runway expansion project was also underway. Hartsfield was ahead of his time in realizing that a city’s position



This 1941 ad shows the city of Atlanta now at the center of Delta’s routes with the launch of new north-south service between Cincinnati and Atlanta.

as an aviation center determined its commercial growth—and that vision soon attracted a hometown airline to Atlanta.

After Delta was awarded a major route expansion in January 1941, Atlanta

became the crossroads of the airline’s 16-city route system. Delta then gained its first northern route, extending from Atlanta to Cincinnati, Ohio; service started on April 15. Delta also extended its original west-east Route 24, from Augusta to Savannah, Georgia.

Looking for sufficient capital and infrastructure to continue expansion, C.E. Woolman and Delta’s directors realized the potential for air transportation in Atlanta, and committed Delta’s future to the city. On March 1, 1941, Delta’s corporate headquarters officially moved to Atlanta. On this date, an agreement between Delta and the city, for lease of property at the Municipal Airport, went into effect. Rent was set at \$2,500 per year.

Initial Construction in 1941

Delta erected a new \$150,000 General Office and Hangar building on the airport property it leased from the City of Atlanta. The structure measured 150 feet x 200 feet, and 250 of Delta’s almost 400 employees worked from there.



Delta’s original 1941 headquarters in Atlanta. The aircraft maintenance hangar—the largest one in the Southeast—and attached office building cost \$150,000 to build.



(left to right) Delta General Manager, and company founder, C. E. Woolman; Atlanta Mayor William B. Hartsfield; and Capt. George Cushing, head of Delta Flight Operations, during expansion of the General Office Building in 1943.



Cleaning a Douglas DC-4 outside Hangar One in 1947. At left, the larger Hangar Two.



The original 1941 hangar and General Office Building, now with wings added in 1942–43. The one-story annex at right held the aircraft engine overhaul, accessory, and machine shops.

Hangar 1 was said to be the largest hangar in the Southeast in 1941, with 148 feet by 125 feet of unobstructed space and a clearance of 28 feet. It was built to accommodate “six giant 21-passenger airplanes,” Delta’s new Douglas DC-3 aircraft. Support facilities under the hangar’s roof included a machine shop, a paint shop, coal and oil storage rooms, locker rooms, and lavatories. The hangar cost \$127,000 to build, of which the City of Atlanta furnished \$50,000.

With a plain red-brick exterior—still used on all new buildings at Delta headquarters—and simple, functional interior spaces, the style of this original building reflected Delta’s focus on good service, rather than ornate corporate facilities, to represent the airline—and the thrifty nature of its founder, C.E. Woolman. According to the employee magazine *Delta Digest*, in September 1944:

Delta’s accommodations are not plushy and luxurious, nor streamlined in ultra-modern style. General office building walls are painted plain ochre. Only two offices are carpeted... This in a way, reflects the spirit and policy of Delta—to be conservative, to hint at no self-importance or lavish resources, to let the record stand on its own...

Additions Built in 1942–1943

In the midst of World War II, Delta added two wings to its headquarters building. The new facilities were needed to take care of the overflow of new employees resulting from war work—modification of military aircraft, training military pilots and flying cargo—and the normal growth of the airline, both present and future. Delta expanded its

routes in 1943, between Fort Worth, Texas, and New Orleans, Louisiana, and began advertising itself as “The Air Line of the South.”

The first wing constructed was a one-story addition to the southwest corner of the building. It accommodated expanded activities in the engine overhaul, accessory and machine shops. It was completed in late 1942.

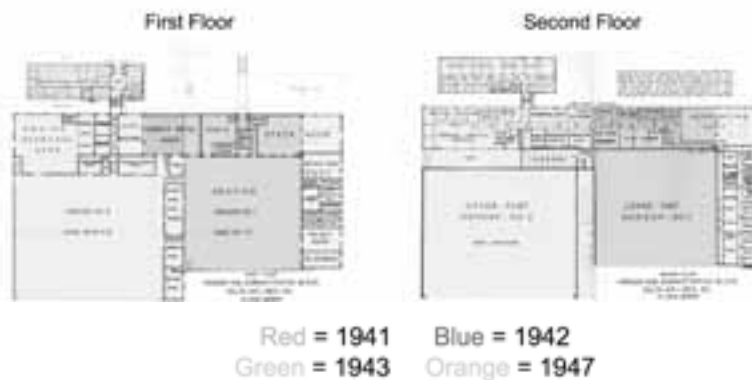
The second wing was a two-story office annex, extending 50 feet wide in front of the original building and 190 feet deep along the north side of the original building. A courtyard, between the original building and the annex, allowed windows on all sides of the new building. Delta’s accounting department, soon to double in size, was the first to move in, occupying the northwest corner of the second floor. New restrooms on the first floor of the annex were provided for the convenience of the many women mechanics and clerks, who had joined the company since the war started.

Headquarters Double in Size in 1947

In the immediate post-war period, 1946 was a significant year for Delta, as reported to stockholders:

This has been a year of transition, a year in which Delta emerged as a major air carrier of the nation. One main reason for this was the opening of the Chicago-Miami and Chicago-Charleston routes, increasing the system total by 1,036 miles and lifting Delta out of the regional or area class. Another main cause was the addition of new equipment, as Delta placed 44-passenger Douglas DC-4s in service to match the speed, capacity

Delta’s 1940s headquarters



The historic 1940s area of today’s Delta headquarters was built as two aircraft maintenance hangars with attached administrative and support facilities. This blueprint shows how the complex grew from 1941 to 1947.



Atlanta Municipal Airport in 1946. Delta’s hangar and office facilities are shown a short distance down the road—today’s Delta Boulevard—behind the tall white terminal building.



(right-left) Hangar One, built in 1941, and Hangar Two, built in 1947, shown here with aircraft undergoing maintenance and overhaul work in 1953.



Delta personnel outside the new Executive Building in 1947.



Delta's headquarters more than doubled in size in 1947, with a second larger aircraft hangar, with attached office and support facilities, and a new executive building in front.

and non-stop service of other airlines of the nation.

Delta now had access to the second largest city in the U.S. and a route with enormous potential for vacation travel. As the first airline in the East to introduce the DC-4, Delta also had a good start in the post-war race against its main competitor for Chicago to Miami travel—Eastern Airlines.

The new routes, aircraft and rising passenger and cargo loads, created a need for more employees and expanded facilities at the airline's hub in Atlanta. By 1947, the airline operated 44 daily flights between 35 cities in thirteen states, and employed 2,050 people, with 1,000 of them in Atlanta. New administration and operations spaces were required to support the airline's growth.

Delta's headquarters more than doubled in size in 1947, with a \$1 million addition of a two-story executive office building and a second maintenance hangar. The 29,450 square foot hangar had a span of 187 feet and clearance of 32 feet, capable of handling Douglas DC-4 aircraft. There was also 15,790 additional square feet of shop space.

The new executive building included a large, functional, northwest corner office for C.E. Woolman, Delta's principal founder and first CEO. From this location, he managed Delta's growth from regional to major airline, until his death in 1966. He had an open door policy for his office, welcoming visits from any employee with concerns. Delta retirees have vivid memories of meeting Woolman, his personal concern for employees, his memorable quotes and charisma. They also remember his office, with desk and windowsills piled

with papers and magazines, and how Woolman was always able to lay hands on any piece of paper he needed. From his office, Woolman established a close-knit business team with the primary goal of good customer service—the “Delta difference.”

Symbol of Delta and Atlanta Partnership

“Aviation will extend Atlanta’s horizon of business influence.”

—C. E. Woolman, 1946

The move to Atlanta in 1941 solidified a partnership between airline and city that was initiated eleven years earlier when Delta provided the first scheduled passenger service to the city. Delta Air Service launched a trial service from Birmingham, Alabama, on June 12, 1930, and on June 18 made it an “official” permanent route. All Delta passenger operations were suspended on October 1, 1930 (Eastern started passenger service later that December). After winning an air mail contract, Delta re-established its Ft. Worth-Atlanta route on July 4, 1934, securing its place in Atlanta’s aviation history as the airport’s oldest continuous tenant.

As Delta grew into an important air carrier, it contributed significantly to changing Atlanta, a city founded by railroad commerce, into a major air transportation hub. From its Atlanta headquarters, Delta and Atlanta marked many innovations in air transportation over the years:

Delta was an early pioneer of the hub-and-spoke air traffic system, starting in Atlanta.

Atlanta’s first jet service: to New York on September 18, 1959.

First nonstop service from Atlanta to California in 1961.

First nonstop trans-Atlantic service from Atlanta: to London-Gatwick in April 1978.

First airline in the world to board one million passengers in one city in one month (in Atlanta in August 1979).

First airline to board two million passengers in one city in one month (in Atlanta in 1997).

First commercial flight to land on the new fifth runway at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, hailed as “The Most Important Runway in America” when it opened on May 27, 2006.

Today, Atlanta is the world’s largest airline hub, with more than 1,000 daily departures to 226 destinations, and Delta serves 354 destinations in 65 countries on six continents. Although Delta operates on a global scale today, sections of Delta’s original 1940s buildings still serve as the business center of the airline’s operations.

The Site Today

This site is now a part of Delta and Atlanta aviation, past and present. The office spaces in today’s Delta Buildings A and B are still used for company business by staff and executives, and still house the office of Delta’s CEO, now Richard Anderson. Except for a modification to Hangar 1—raising the roof three feet for larger aircraft in 1952—the two hangars remain remarkably similar to their original construction. Today, the hangars house

a museum, and even support aircraft maintenance on a small scale—for Delta’s fleet of vintage aircraft.

After they were constructed in the 1940s, the two hangars housed all of Delta’s aircraft maintenance operations in Atlanta, until jets arrived and an immense Jet Base (located at today’s Technical Operations Center) opened in 1960. Hangars 1 and 2 were used as a secondary maintenance location for Delta jets until the mid 1980s. In about 1985, airport and county officials built two new roads, Toffie Terrace and Woolman Place, severing the hangars from airport property. The hangars grew quiet, used only for storage by the surrounding offices. In 1995, the non-profit Delta Air Transport Heritage Museum was founded and moved into the historic hangars, which are now open to the public by appointment.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Delta publications and image collections, 1941–1947, Delta Air Lines Corporate Archives

Delta Corporate Communications and Real Estate department records, Delta Air Lines Corporate Archives

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In addition, AIAA sponsors many technical conferences, seminars, and short courses per year, and publishes *Aerospace America*, the *AIAA Student Journal*, and seven archival technical journals. The Institute also publishes conference papers and proceedings, technology assessments, position papers, many books, and a variety of career-related educational materials. The Institute conducts a rigorous public policy program and works closely with other societies and with governments in broad areas of mutual concern.

AIAA established the Historic Aerospace Sites Program in January 2000 to promote the preservation of and to disseminate information about significant accomplishments made in the aerospace profession. In addition to the Delta Air Lines Headquarters, other sites recognized by the committee include the NASA Langley Research Center, Allegheny Ballistics Laboratory in West Virginia; Oakland Municipal Airport, and the site of the first balloon launch in Annonay, France.

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