

# Southeastern PA Cold War Historical Society

Celebrating  
our 16th  
year



*Preserving History Through the Memories  
of Those Who Created It*

# The Greater Philadelphia Region has a rich aerospace heritage!

To celebrate **America250**, we'll be sharing some of the region's aerospace heritage throughout 2026!  
Look for our monthly posts and Happy Birthday America!



**250 AMERICA PA**  
NONPROFIT AFFILIATE



**250 AMERICA PA**  
BUCKS COUNTY

# *Did you know?*

**The first manned, free flight in America  
didn't take place at Kitty Hawk in 1903**

**It actually took place 110 years earlier in Philadelphia!**

## June 4th, 1783, marketplace in Annonay, France

Jacques-Étienne and Joseph-Michel Montgolfier publicly demonstrate an unmanned hot air balloon for the first time. Their enormous paper balloon contained a brazier with burning straw and wool at the bottom. It rose 3,000 feet into the air for about ten minutes before landing, in flames, a mile and a half from its point of departure.



In 1783, the Montgolfier Brothers' hot air balloon flights around Paris were a sensation

## September 19, 1783, the second unmanned hot air balloon flight, Palace of Versailles

The Montgolfiers were invited by King Louis XVI to demonstrate their hot air balloon. They built a much larger balloon made of paper and cloth with a basket to carry the first live balloon passengers-- a sheep, a rooster, and a duck (instead of two convicted criminals, which had been the King's suggestion!) This second flight utilized hydrogen for lift and lasted eight minutes, landing two miles away. One hundred and thirty thousand spectators, including the royal family, witnessed the grand event.



## November 21st, 1783- the first manned untethered flight

Pilatre de Rozier, a chemistry and physics teacher (who volunteered in place of a designated prisoner), and François Laurent, Marquis d'Arlandes, ascended 3000 feet in a Montgolfier balloon that journeyed five and a half miles in about 25 minutes. The flight began on the grounds of the Château de la Muette, west of Paris, and landed outside the city ramparts on the Butte-aux-Cailles.



Benjamin  
Franklin



In 1783, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and John Jay were in Paris negotiating the peace treaty to end the Revolutionary War. They likely witnessed the first hot air balloon flights by the Montgolfier Brothers and others.

Benjamin Franklin wrote as early as July of that year to his network of scientific correspondents of the balloon developments. He wrote that balloons ***“may pave the Way to some Discoveries in Natural Philosophy of which at present we have no Conception.”***

John  
Adams

In a letter to Congressman Robert Livingston, John Jay predicted that, ***“travelers may hereafter literally pass from country to country on the wings of the wind.”***

John  
Jay



American newspaper coverage began in November 1783 when the *Salem Gazette* reported on the balloon activity in Paris.

George Washington was fascinated by the first published reports of aeronautical activity. In remarks to a friend in April 1784, Washington wrote, ***“I have only news paper accts. of Air Balloons, to which I do not what credence to give. The tales related of them are marvelous and lead us to expect that our friends at Paris, in a little time, will come flying thro’ the air, instead of ploughing the ocean to get to America.”***

Washington’s interest in balloons is also supported by his letter of November 25, 1785 to the Irish politician Sir Edward Newenham in which he recommended that ***“young men of science and spirit” should be offered “handsome public encouragements...for the risks they run in ascertaining its [the balloon’s] usefulness.”***



Dr. John Foulke, a Philadelphia physician, studying in Europe from the spring of 1780 to the fall of 1783, was in Paris during the autumn of 1783 and thus a witness to the balloon activity. On May 10, 1784, Foulke delivered a lecture on pneumatics that included a demonstration of a hot air balloon- a small, unmanned paper test balloon released from the courtyard of the Dutch minister's residence in Philadelphia- marking one of the earliest public aerostatic experiments in the United States. Foulke was a member of the American Philosophical Society and had been actively promoting interest in aeronautics, inspired by the Montgolfier Brothers' hot-air balloon flights in France.



On June 17, 1784, the first documented tethered, unmanned balloon ascension in America took place in a field near the town of Bladensburg, MD. The man responsible for this remarkable event was an enterprising innkeeper and lawyer named Peter Carnes. Carnes conducted the balloon ascension as a public exhibition. It was originally intended to be a tethered, manned ascent, but while the balloon was being brought closer to town for the exhibition, a gust of wind blew the passenger basket against a fence and damaged it severely. Because of this mishap, it was unsafe for anyone to go aloft with the balloon, so a tethered, unmanned balloon ascent took place instead. However, one-week later, Carnes conducted another public exhibition of his balloon. This time the location was Baltimore, and the tethered balloon was sent aloft with a 13-year-old boy as a passenger.

[Aeronautics and Aerospace Industry - Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia \(philadelphiaencyclopedia.org\)](http://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org)

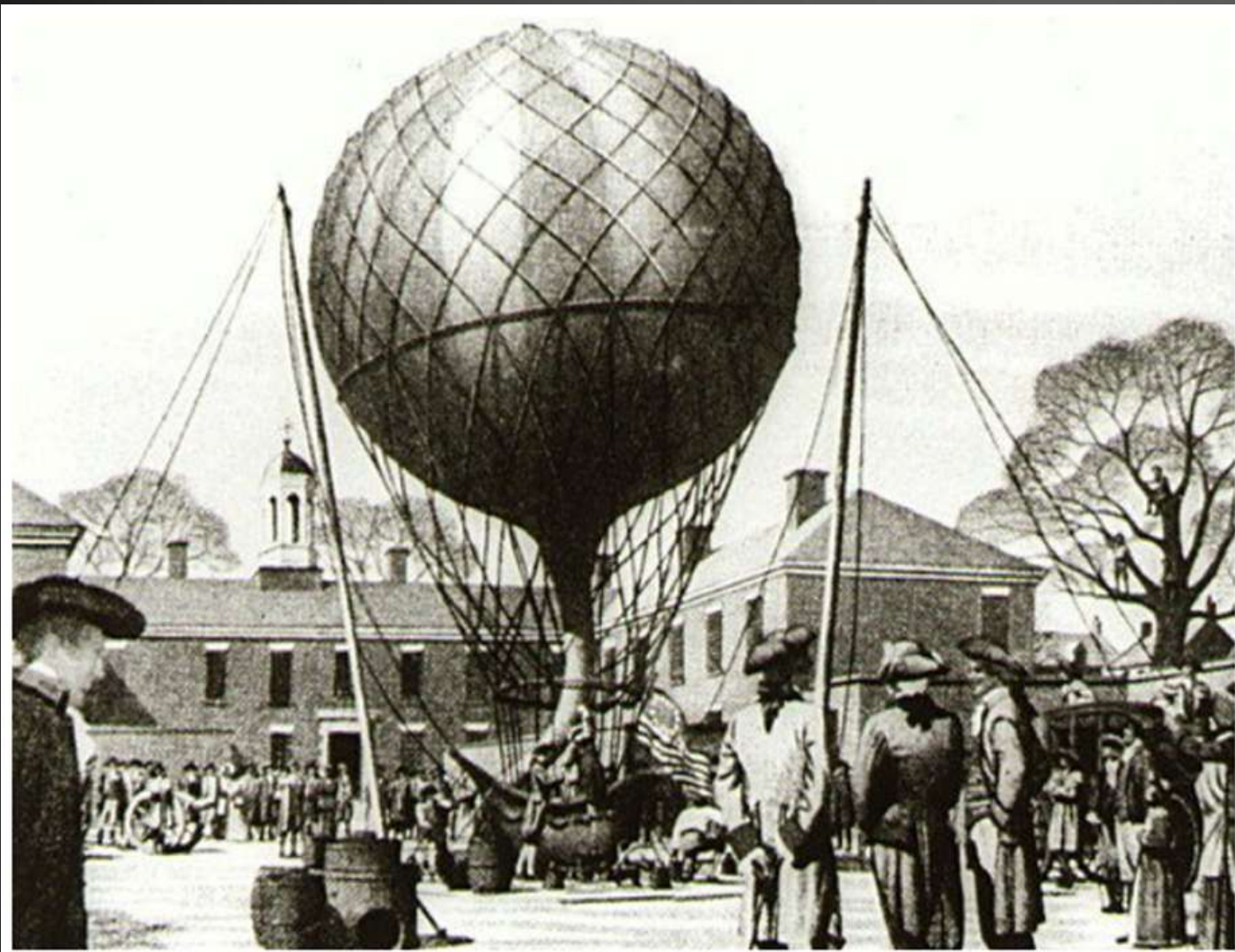
[George Washington and the Inception of Aeronautics in the Young Republic on JSTOR](#)

Facebook post, Oct 22, 2022 (Town of Bladensburg)

In the early days of ballooning, Frenchman Jean-Pierre-François Blanchard was the leading European aeronaut, having made 44 ascents, including the first crossing of the English Channel with co-aeronaut John Jeffries in 1785.

In January 1793, Blanchard arrived in Philadelphia, where he announced the sale of tickets for the first untethered manned balloon flight in the United States.





On Jan. 9, 1793, at 10:10 am, Blanchard took to the air in an untethered, hydrogen-filled, yellow silk balloon from the interior yard of Philadelphia's Walnut Street Prison before a cheering crowd who had paid \$2 to \$5 per ticket.

In attendance was President George Washington and future presidents John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and James Monroe.

On board Blanchard's balloon were various scientific instruments and a small dog.

THE  
FIRST AIR VOYAGE  
IN AMERICA  
JANUARY 9, 1793



A First Person Account  
BY  
JEAN PIERRE BLANCHARD

Blanchard's balloon rose to an altitude of ~1200 feet and proceeded to drift in a southeasterly direction for 15 miles.

Less than an hour later, having crossed the Delaware River by air, Blanchard's balloon landed near the village of Deptford, NJ. After assistance from local farmers, Blanchard returned to Philadelphia later that evening to share his aerial adventure with George Washington.

[George Washington and Ballooning](#) | [George Washington's Mount Vernon](#)

[First Flight in America](#) | [Federal Aviation Administration](#)

Greg Kennedy (image)

Because Blanchard did not speak English, President Washington presented him with a “passport” guaranteeing his safe passage wherever he landed:

*George Washington, President of the United States of America, to all to whom these presents shall come. The bearer hereof, Mr. Blanchard a citizen of France, proposing to ascend in a balloon from the city of Philadelphia, at 10 o'clock, A.M. this day, to pass in such direction and to descend in such place as circumstances may render most convenient—These are therefore to recommend to all citizens of the United States, and others, that in his passage, descent, return or journeying elsewhere, they oppose no hindrance or molestation to the said Mr. Blanchard; And, that on the contrary, they receive and aid him with that humanity and good will which may render honor to their country, and justice to an individual so distinguished by his efforts to establish and advance an art, in order to make it useful to mankind in general.*



The interior of the Deptford Municipal Building is hung with multiple paintings of the Jean Pierre Blanchard landing near the Clement Oak in Deptford, NJ

**This letter was the first airmail ever delivered in the United States!**

Deptford, NJ is proud of their heritage associated with the first manned, untethered balloon flight in the US



Deptford Township holds an annual “Come Fly With Us” ceremony- a community celebration honoring the township’s historic role in the first manned hot-air balloon flight in the United States. The event is held each January at the Deptford Recreation Center and serves both as a tribute to local history and as a recognition of student creativity.





A mural depicting Blanchard's historic balloon flight on the Deptford Municipal Court wall.  
(Deptford Twp-Municipal Facebook Page, January 9, 2023)



# FIRST & FINEST - HOT AIR BALLOON

**First and Finest is the only police hot air balloon in the U.S.**



The "First & Finest" hot air balloon began, as an idea of Deptford Police Lieutenant Steve Moylan, to use Deptford's place in aviation history and a hot air balloon to promote police and community cooperation.

As officer in charge of police special operations, some of Steve's duties were to develop and implement community relations programs.

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Deptford Township Displays Its History with Pride**

*Replica of First U.S. Balloon Flight Basket to Be Featured*

**DEPTFORD, NJ — April 30, 2026 —** Deptford Township will showcase a unique piece of American aviation history on Monday, May 4 at 1:00 p.m. at the Deptford Township Municipal Building (1011 Cooper St, Deptford, NJ 08096). A replica of the historic Blanchard balloon basket will be on display.

The replica represents the vessel used by French aeronaut Jean-Pierre Blanchard during the first manned balloon flight in the Americas. On January 9, 1793, Blanchard launched from Philadelphia and landed in Deptford after a 46-minute journey witnessed by George Washington and four future U.S. presidents, cementing the township's place in aviation history.

"It's such a historical event," said Mayor Paul Medary. "This didn't happen anywhere else—it landed right here in Deptford Township, so I think our responsibility is to tell the history of it."

The replica basket, typically housed at the New England Air Museum, is visiting South Jersey following a recent exhibition at the Athenaeum of Philadelphia. The display was arranged by Mike Thornton, Curator and Director of Interpretations at the museum and a longtime advocate for aviation history preservation.

Local supporters, including Steve Moylan of Deptford's First and Finest Balloon Company and Deb Harding of Air Ventures, have also played a role in promoting awareness of Blanchard's historic landing.

The public and members of the media are invited to attend the event. Photo and interview opportunities will be available.

**Contact:**

Deptford Township Manager's Office

856-845-5300

deptford-nj.org

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Basket constructed and flown in 1993 to mark the 200th anniversary of the first manned flight in America made by French aeronaut Jean-Pierre Blanchard in Philadelphia (on loan from the New England Air Museum, and recently on display at the Philadelphia Athenaeum, located on the site of the old Walnut Street Prison, where Blanchard launched his balloon in 1793)