



SEATTLE MUSEUM OF HISTORY & INDUSTRY

By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

The owner of a lumber company takes an interest in the Pacific Northwest and then in airplanes. He learns to fly, buys a plane, and then realizes: *Hey! I could build these!*

William E. Boeing incorporated the Pacific Aero Products Company on July 15, 1916 — 110 years ago.

Next thing you know, his company was building World War II and Cold War workhorses, the world’s most popular passenger planes ... and space vehicles.

THE BIRTH OF AN AEROSPACE SUPERPOWER

The son of a lumber magnate, William E. Boeing graduated from Yale University and moved to the Pacific Northwest in 1903 to continue growing his lumber operations. In 1910, he bought a company that built wooden boats in a shipyard at the mouth of the Duwamish River.

After watching an airplane demonstration at the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle, Boeing became interested in flight. In 1915, he took flying lessons from airplane pioneer Glenn Martin and bought a seaplane from him that needed to be disassembled and shipped to Seattle.

Boeing had the plane assembled but the plane crashed and was damaged during testing. He was disappointed when he learned it might take

months for replacement parts to arrive.

“We could build a better plane ourselves and build it faster,” Boeing told his friend, Navy Cmdr. George Conrad Westervelt. Westervelt agreed and together, they built a high-performance aircraft they called the B&W Seaplane, which they first flew on June 15, 1916.

A month later, Boeing incorporated Pacific Aero Products and began converting his old boatworks into a



William E. Boeing



George Conrad Westervelt

manufacturing plant for airplanes. Boeing changed the name of his company to the Boeing Airplane Company a year after that.

Westervelt left the company after he was transferred to a post on the East Coast. He later joined forces with the Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Company and later became vice president of Curtiss-Wright.

In 1923, Boeing began building fighter planes for the U.S. Army Air

Force. In 1925, it began building planes designed for Air Mail.

In 1934, the U.S. government forced Boeing to split his growing monopoly into three separate companies — one of which became United Air Lines. Boeing took the opportunity to leave the future of his companies to others.

During World War II, Boeing and its partners worked together to produce 98,965 aircraft. By the end of the 20th century, Boeing had absorbed several other aviation companies, including Douglas Aircraft, McDonnell Aircraft, North American Aviation, and the Hughes Aircraft Company.

Today, Boeing is the largest exporter in the United States and the world’s fourth-largest defense contractor.



BOEING

The U.S. Navy declined to buy Boeing and Westervelt’s B&W seaplane, so they sold it to a flying school in New Zealand instead.



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In “the Red Barn” Boeing factory, builders and accountants worked downstairs while engineers worked upstairs. The factory closed in 1970.



U.S. ARMY AIR FORCE

B-29 Superfortress strategic bombers on an assembly line at Wichita, Kansas, during World War II.

A BOEING HALL OF FAME

A few of the vehicles that Boeing and its subsidiaries have manufactured over the years:

BOEING 247 1933

The world’s first modern airliner could carry 10 passengers 600 miles at about 160 miles per hour. Five years later, Boeing would introduce a four-engine, long-haul aircraft, the 307 Stratoliner.



B-17 FLYING FORTRESS 1938

The B-17 used 13 machine guns to protect itself, at the cost of a lower bomb load. Still, it could carry three tons of bombs. Boeing built 12,731 B-17s — two for every one lost in action.



B-29 SUPERFORTRESS 1944

The largest and most advanced bomber produced during World War II, B-29s could carry 10 tons of bombs. They were used to drop atomic bombs on Japan. Boeing built 3,970 of them by the end of the war.



KC-135 STRATOTANKER 1957

Developed alongside Boeing’s 707 jetliner, the Air Force’s first jet-powered in-flight refueling tanker. Boeing built 803 KC-135s — many of which are expected to remain in service until 2030.



BOEING 707 1958

Hoping to outshine popular planes by Lockheed and McDonnell Douglas, Boeing bet half the total value of the company on the first dual-role military tanker/civil airliner. Boeing built 865 and ended production in 1978.



BOEING 727 1963

The 727 used the same fuselage diameter as the 707 but flew faster and further, with three rear-mounted engines. Boeing built 1,831 before ending production in 1984 of what had become the world’s best-selling transport.



1967 SATURN S-1C

Boeing built 15 of the first stage of the Saturn V rockets that put man on the moon in 1969. More than 90% of its mass at launch was propellant: 2,077 tons of it, which it burned through in 2 minutes and 30 seconds.



1968 BOEING 737

The 737’s short, fat fuselage and wing-mounted engines gave passengers a “big jet” feel. Boeing has built and sold more than 12,000 and upgraded the plane in 1997 and 2000. The current version is the 737 Max.



1969 BOEING 747

The Boeing 747 “Jumbo Jet” was the world’s first twin-aisle airplane, carrying 467 passengers in a typical configuration and with a range of 9,200 miles. Boeing built 1,574 jets before ending production in 2023.



1995 BOEING 777

The world’s largest twinjet and the most-built wide-body airliner features improved cockpit controls and advanced avionics to reduce pilot workload and improve safety. Boeing has delivered more than 1,788 777s.



2011 BOEING 787 DREAMLINER

Boeing’s aim was to introduce a passenger jet that used 20% less fuel than its 767 but could still carry 300 to 400 passengers up to 9,800 miles. Boeing has delivered more than 1,200 Dreamliners.



2019 CST-100 BOEING STARLINER

NASA awarded Boeing a contract in 2014 to produce a reusable capsule that could carry a crew of seven. After two unmanned tests were “partial failures,” it carried two astronauts to the International Space Station in 2024.