



The AMA History Project Presents:  
History of  
**PAUL K. and GERTRUDE GUILLOW**  
and GUILLOW'S (PAUL K. GUILLOW, INCORPORATED)  
Started in 1926



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Written by JS (03/2012) and DD (2016); Reformatted by JS (04/2012, 03/2016)

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*The following was published in the Spring 2012 issue of Cloud 9 newsletter, published by the National Model Aviation Museum. Museum Patrons receive copies four times a year as part of their membership.*

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Visit some of the biographies in the History Project's online listing and you will notice a trend. Many modelers state they started on, or at least grew up on, Guillow's kits. Among them are Jerry Smith, Lou Andrews, Bob Aberle, Mark Bibbey, Herb Kothe, Emil Caluory, Danny Lutz, and Gene Wallock. How about you?

Paul K. Guillow Incorporated, or "Guillow's" as most people know it, was formed in 1926 when it was called Nucraft Toys. Mr. Guillow founded the company in his family's barn and produced games associated with flight, like The New Lindy Flying Game, as well as WWI scale model kits. Eventually it was moved due to increase in demand of his balsa kits, and a downtown service station did the trick in his small town of Wakefield, Massachusetts, 10 miles north of Boston. (This town is not to be confused with Wakefield models and events, especially popular in Europe and America at that time.)

When it was moved again to 400 New Salem Street, its name changed to Paul K. Guillow Incorporated; it still serves as its location almost 80 years after moving in.

Paul's shelf model kits helped increase business, and he began selling them to national chain stores. His business boomed up until the next war. During the war years, his company lacked balsa supplies, and some of the quality was reduced by their use of other materials - woods and papers. It wasn't until the 1950s that a "resurgence in the demand for "stick and tissue" kits brought new prosperity to Guillow's."

<http://www.guillow.com/aboutus.aspx>

After Paul's passing in 1951, his family took over the company. The company branched into jets and spacecraft kits. New advertising and toys came about in the 1960s. And in 1998, it purchased Comet Industries, another huge model product company.

If you ever buy their products at a local store or order kits in bulk for your club's activities, a lot of their packaging still looks the same from several decades ago. They seem to follow the adage "If it's not broke, don't fix it." Well, it looks like Guillow's will be sticking around for a long time – no need to fix that.

If you would like to purchase individual Guillow's model kits, they are available through our store at <http://www.modelaircraft.org/shopama/search.aspx?s=guillow&d=>.

For more information about Guillow's, including information used for this article, please visit their website at [www.guillow.com](http://www.guillow.com).



*1969: Inner page of Guillow's catalog, advertising their Sky Streak. The Museum offers Sky Streak-building for tour groups. [Source: #0043 Manufacturers and Companies Collection, National Model Aviation Museum Archives]*



*1969: Guillow's catalog [Source: #0043 Manufacturers and Companies Collection, National Model Aviation Museum Archives]*

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*The following article was written by Don DeLoach and published in the April 2016 issue of Model Aviation magazine. (Online at <http://modelaviation.com/paul-k-guillow-inc>)*

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## **Paul K. Guillow, Inc. Ninety years of model aviation**

A name synonymous with stick-and-tissue model aircraft for generations, the Paul K. Guillow Company in Wakefield, Massachusetts, is celebrating 90 years in business in 2016. The company was originally founded by Paul Guillow (rhymes with willow) in 1926 as NuCraft Toys.

Born in 1893, Paul Guillow was a World War I naval veteran who brought home from Europe an abiding love for the burgeoning technology of aviation. Paul founded his

aviation-themed toy business at the perfect time: one year before Charles Lindbergh ignited a worldwide craze following his 1927 transatlantic solo flight. Paul seized on this event by introducing his successful card game, The Lindy Flying Game.

NuCraft's first model airplane product was a line of small balsa static models of combat aircraft flown in the war. Another shift followed when Paul recognized a high demand for flying models, and expanded the line to Free Flight (FF) rubber-powered scale and glider kits.

In 1933, Paul moved the expanding company from his barn into the present headquarters on Salem Street in Wakefield, a hamlet approximately 12 miles outside of Boston.

In the 1940s, Paul - by then an expert on model aircraft-wrote several books, including Tom's Book of Flying Models and Flying Models: How to Build Them. Paul died in 1951, but the company continued to thrive under the leadership of his widow, Gertrude. For 35 years Guillow's was family-owned and operated, until it was finally transferred to an Employee Stock Ownership Plan, with annual revenues between \$3 and \$5 million as of 2010.

Most Guillow's kits are old-fashioned balsa and tissue, just as they were 80 years ago. Plastic propellers, vacuumed-formed spinners, and molded canopies were upgrades in the 1960s, but since then, little has changed. Most kits are scale models in the 16- to 35-inch wingspan range and most are designed for FF.

Guillow's is proud to use plantation-grown balsa imported directly from Ecuador, and the company is quick to note that the harvesting process is kind to the rain forest. It is also proud to state that all of its products (except for a small foam helicopter toy) are made in Wakefield.

By the mid-1990s, Guillow's was gobbling up its competition, acquiring Tiger, Inc. in Los Angeles and Comet of Chicago. Tiger was a leader in promotional flying toys imprinted with company names and graphics; Comet was a direct competitor in balsa kits and gliders.

Guillow's is still on Salem Street in Wakefield. The factory complex has gradually expanded, but today continues to use many of its original Depression-era tools. The recent upgrade of a laser cutter has brought Guillow's kits into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Now the balsa parts are accurate and true-fitting, making the kits easier to build.

As every model builder knows, balsa airplane models are fragile. For some they are too fragile – thus, they fail to deliver on expectations. This infamous 1959 letter by disgruntled customer Robert Higgins still hangs in Guillow's Wakefield office:

"I have bought one of your fifty cent planes, and it broke as soon as it left the ground. If you don't make your rotten fifty cent plane better, my friends & I won't buy your planes

anymore. I think you have the lousiest planes from the lousiest wood (please take this as an insult): drop dead."

Maybe poor Robert was ham-handed, or didn't have a good mentor, or both. Now, in 2016, Guillow's has 69 stick-and-tissue kits in its catalog and several dozen slide-together flying toys. Many of the designs are unchanged from 50-plus years ago, save for laser cutting upgrades and other small tweaks.

A few surprises have been revealed in the 2016 catalog, including some new designs capable of contest-winning performance, and some static models (even jets) that offer jaw-dropping realism.

-Don DeLoach  
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**SOURCES:**

Paul K. Guillow, Inc.  
(781) 245-5255  
[www.guillow.com](http://www.guillow.com)

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*The following is from Jay Smith's column, "The Inside Loop," in the April 2016 issue of Model Aviation magazine.*

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## **Happy anniversary**

It's likely that for many of us, our first exposure to a Guillow's kit came from one of the company's many inexpensive gliders. Monoplanes and biplanes, wrapped in colorful plastic bags, were strategically placed near the registers at local hobby shops, enticing pilots of all ages to take part in the simple and inexpensive joy of aviation.

Some of the aircraft offered included options such as catapult-launch and rubber-powered models. I built, flew - and occasionally crashed a large number of these models. My favorites were the biplanes.

For many, these inexpensive gliders were like appetizers that led us to tackle larger and more complex models that required a box to hold all of the parts. Tucked neatly inside we would find the parts and plans, as well as the undeniable smell of balsa wood.

Moving up to these bigger Guillow's kits provided a much larger selection of aircraft than did the gliders. In later years, many kits also included plastic parts for cowls and canopies to aid in the completion of the model.

Interestingly, this experience has been shared with several generations of modelers and is still being enjoyed today, as Guillow's celebrates 90 years in business. So instead of

raising a glass to celebrate, upload a photo or two of your Guillow's models to [www.ModelAviation.com](http://www.ModelAviation.com) and we can all celebrate together.

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