This fall, the Smithsonian Institution observed the one-hundredth anniversary of the Wright brothers’ epic and epoch-changing first flight at Kitty Hawk in a rather spectacular way. Our sister museum, the National Air and Space Museum, opened its massive Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center near Dulles airport this December. This remarkable indoor space puts on display such enormous witnesses to the age of flight as the supersonic passenger jet, the Concorde.

With this issue we congratulate NASM and our nation by doing what we believe the National Portrait Gallery does best: telling the story of an important chapter of American history by focusing on the individuals who shaped that story. You won’t be surprised that we include an article on the Wright brothers; but you might be surprised to learn that Orville Wright long held a gripe against the Smithsonian because of its claims on behalf of its onetime Secretary, Samuel P. Langley. It was Langley, the venerable institution insisted far too long, who had built the first vehicle “capable” of motorized flight. Only after the Smithsonian had seen the light did Orville permit the Wright flyer to come here.

And I know you will be surprised to learn of the career of one Solomon Andrews, who began as early as 1847 his quest to produce a steerable, balloon-based airship. I’ll leave the telling of that story to Ann Shumard, but I want to emphasize how fortunate the National Portrait Gallery is to have recently acquired Robert Cornelius’s daguerreotype of Andrews, believed to date from 1842, the time Will Stapp, our first curator of photography, called “the dawn of photography.” Which makes it a record of two dawns—aviation and photography.

When the National Portrait Gallery first opened to the public in the late sixties, representing yet another “dawn,” it was not allowed to collect photographs, a restriction lifted, happily, in 1976. That the Gallery faced a remarkable challenge to tell the biography of our nation by building a worthy collection of portraits seems not to have daunted the distinguished group of individuals who formed the Gallery’s first Commission. I know you will enjoy Margaret Christman’s telling of that story. I knew many of the individuals described, having first come to the Gallery only some six years after its opening, and I salute their contribution and that of their successors who guide us today. So here’s to the pioneers: of air and space, of photography, and of our great museum. We owe them a lot. ♦

Marc Peckle
PROFIEL

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Pilots, Prophets, and Portraits:
*Highlights from a Century of Powered Flight*

Anne Collins Goodyear
Assistant Curator of Prints and Drawings

**General James H. Doolittle & Captain James G. Haizlip**

“Smash All Records Flying for Shell” by Buehler, 1932

Cast as an “extra” edition, this poster celebrates the exploits of two of Shell Oil’s best-known stunt pilots, Jimmy Doolittle and Jimmy Haizlip, at the September 1932 Cleveland air races. During the event, Haizlip set a new transcontinental speed record, while Doolittle enjoyed a spectacular victory in the Thompson Trophy race. As Doolittle later explained, pilots of the era felt “a strong desire to participate, to compete, to set any kind of record or establish an aviation ‘first.’” Doolittle’s interest in aircraft performance helped bring about important breakthroughs in the development and marketing of high-octane fuel. His courage as a pilot cemented his place in history when he led the first aerial raid over Japan of World War II in April 1942. Toward the end of his career, Doolittle described the secret to his success: “The trick was to learn to expand your limitations, gradually expand them, but never go beyond them.”

**Lieutenant Robert Diez**

“Keep Us Flying,” after Betsy Graves Reyneau, 1943

A member of the elite 99th Fighter Squadron, composed exclusively of African Americans, Robert Diez posed for Betsy Graves Reyneau during her trip to the Tuskegee Institute to paint George Washington Carver. Reyneau’s portrait became the basis for this war-bond poster, which demonstrates the critical role played by the Tuskegee Airmen in the war effort. The 99th Fighter Squadron, assigned to escort and protect bombers, never lost a single one of their charges, and Franklin Roosevelt awarded the unit two presidential citations. Questioned by a reporter during the war, Diez offered a powerful testament to the social and military importance of the Tuskegee Airmen: “It irks us when people refer to us as an experiment. We are not conceited, but we feel we can fly as good as anybody else.”

**Amelia Earhart**

by Hugo Gellert, c. 1932

On May 20–21, 1932, exactly five years after Charles Lindbergh completed his famous solo flight across the Atlantic, Amelia Earhart became the first woman to do the same. Hugo Gellert’s portrait of Earhart, inspired by her 1932 book *The Fun of It*, pictures the distinguished aviator in a style inspired by Futurist artists who celebrated the speed and technology of the modern era. Gellert’s drawing, showing Earhart’s head cocked forward and hair streaming back, both acknowledges the source of Earhart’s fame and casts her as a “new woman” of the modern era. Indeed Earhart, who held aviation records for altitude and speed, hoped that her success would increase opportunities for women. As she wrote in 1937: “Probably my greatest satisfaction was to indicate by example now and then, that women can sometimes do things themselves if given the chance.”

4  *Pilots, Prophets, and Portraits*
Flip Schulke’s 1961 photograph pictures the “Mercury 7,” American’s first seven astronauts and participants in Project Mercury, the first phase of the American space program. From left to right stand Alan Shepard (whose head appears first), Walter “Wally” M. Schirra Jr., Virgil “Gus” Grissom, Scott Carpenter, John Glenn, Donald “Deke” Slayton, and Gordon Cooper. Well dressed and training their attention on a monitor picturing a gantry at Cape Canaveral, the team of men whom author Tom Wolfe described as embodying the “right stuff” convey intelligence, competence, and even warmth. Although the Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin earned the title of the first man in space on April 12, 1961, the Mercury 7 astronauts were national heroes. Shepard became the first American in space on May 5, 1961, and less than a year later Glenn became the first American to orbit the earth.

Published in the October 20, 1957, issue of the New York Times Magazine, George Tames’s photograph of Wernher von Braun conveys the “space prophet’s” increasing prominence. Through popular magazines and the Disneyland television program, von Braun, who became an American citizen following World War II, had established himself as a vocal advocate of space exploration. Behind von Braun rise four ballistic missiles, which reflect public fears about Sputnik, the Soviet satellite that had been sent into orbit two weeks earlier. The space race had begun, fueling the fulfillment of von Braun’s 1955 prediction that “a practical passenger rocket could be built and tested within ten years.” In 1969 the Saturn V rocket, designed by a team that von Braun supervised, enabled the first astronauts to reach the moon.

Published in 1970, Robert Rauschenberg’s screenprint Signs places the American space program in the broader social and political context of the 1960s. Taking a personal interest in the moonshot, Rauschenberg, who attended the launch of Apollo 11, later explained, “The whole [space] project seemed one of the only things at that time that was not concerned with war and destruction.” Edwin Eugene “Buzz” Aldrin Jr., one of the Apollo 11 astronauts, appears opposite John F. Kennedy, who inspired the moon landing, and who is suggestively rendered as a “profile in courage” in his own right. Other fallen luminaries—Janis Joplin, Robert F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King Jr.—are commemorated. But if the collage contrasts peace versus war and power versus helplessness, its palette of red, white, and blue suggests an overarching order: a tribute not only to those who are gone but to the dreams that endure.

Mercury 7 Astronauts
by Flip Schulke, 1961

Wernher von Braun
by George Tames, 1957, gift of Frances O. Tames

Signs
by Robert Rauschenberg, 1970

Pilots, Prophets, and Portraits
If a portrait genie suddenly appeared at the monthly meeting of the National Portrait Gallery’s curators and historians and said we could order up exactly what we wanted in the way of a likeness of Orville (1871–1948) and Wilbur (1867–1912) Wright, our specifications would probably run along the following lines. First, the image, as generally expected in a good portrait, should offer a reasonably accurate delineation of their features. Second, it would have been taken from life on December 17, 1903, the very day, a century ago, when these two mechanically inclined brothers from Dayton, Ohio, proved that it was indeed possible for human-kind to travel through the air in controlled, mechanized flight. Finally, the image would show the Wrights on the windswept dunes of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, in the act of preparing for that historic moment, preferably with their cloth-winged open aircraft somehow figuring in the tableau.

Unfortunately, unlike the dream of human flight, which the vast majority of the Wrights’ contemporaries dismissed as utterly impossible back in 1903, no such composition was ever created, and there is no portrait genie to wish it into existence retroactively. So, alas, the Gallery will never have its ideal rendering of the two men who convinced a mostly doubting world of humankind’s ability to soar with the birds.

Still, the Gallery is fortunate enough to have in its collections some engaging images of Orville and Wilbur Wright. Although none of these likenesses show them at their most dramatic moment as the world’s foremost pioneers of flight, they nevertheless evoke other memorable aspects of their lives.

Exhibit A is a photograph of Wilbur Wright taken in France by his friend Léon Bollée, dating from the latter part of 1908. In it, Wilbur wears an air of self-assurance that verges on arrogance. The sense of cockiness, however, was well deserved. In the years since their first—and not especially well publicized—flight at Kitty Hawk in 1903, the Wrights had not been particularly interested in providing the world with hard proof of their ability to fly. Instead, they had focused on perfecting their plane to a point where its practical potential was clearly demonstrable. Their efforts, although not strictly secret, were conducted in the relative obscurity of a field outside of Dayton. As a result, even as the brothers quietly made great strides in improving their flying machine, their failure to provide a well-publicized demonstration of their progress led many to dismiss the claims for their invention as the rantings of charlatans. In fact, a successful motorized flight in France in the fall of 1907 had led many Europeans to conclude that the French, and not the Wright brothers, were the true originators of the airplane.

But as Wilbur sat before Bollée’s camera, that misplacement of credit was undergoing correction. In August 1908, at a racecourse near Le Mans, France, Wilbur took to the air in the latest version of the Wrights’ plane and showed the world that he and his brother were far ahead of anyone else in the infant art of aviation. The demonstration left little doubt that their claims to being the originators of motorized flight had been true all along. One commentator noted, “What [Wilbur Wright] does not know [about flying] is not worth knowing”; another called him a “titanic genius”; and a French aviation competitor ruefully conceded that in the race to develop flight, “nous sommes battu[s]” (we are beaten). By January 1909, when he was joined in France by his brother Orville, who had stayed behind in America to demonstrate their plane to the U.S. government, Wilbur was the holder of nine world flying records, including one for flight duration of 2 hours, 18 minutes, and 33 3/5 seconds.

The Portrait Gallery’s likeness of Orville Wright does not belong to a moment nearly as dramatic as brother Wilbur’s French triumph of 1908. Rather, it is part
of the record from Orville’s waning years. Drawn in 1938 for a *New York Times* article commemorating the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Kitty Hawk flight, the likeness shows Orville at age sixty-seven. His brother had succumbed to typhoid fever in 1912, and Orville had, since 1915, been living off profits from the sale of the plane manufacturing company he and Wilbur had founded. Life was quiet for this retiring bachelor who commuted daily from his sprawling suburban mansion to an office in downtown Dayton, where he looked after correspondence and tinkered with various bits of mechanical gadgetry.

Orville was not a chatty sort, and if Oscar Cesare, the *Times* artist-reporter who went to Dayton to interview and draw him, had hoped to come away with new and revelatory musings about Orville’s part in unlocking the secrets of flight, he was sorely disappointed. At least that seemed to be the case, judging from the bland tenor of the resulting article when it ran in the *Times*.

But had Cesare raised the right issue, he might have gotten a quotable rise out of Orville. As serene as his present life might seem, one unsettled matter continued to rankle him: the Smithsonian Institution was not yet willing to concede unequivocally that the Wrights were the originators of motorized flight. Instead, while it acknowledged that the brothers had been the first to make a successful flight, the Smithsonian held on to the claim that its own Secretary, aviation pioneer Samuel P. Langley, had built the world’s first vehicle “capable” of motorized flight. That claim, however, rested on an obviously deceptive retesting in 1914 of Langley’s aerodrome that had crashed into the Potomac in its original failed attempts at flight back in the fall of 1903. For years, the Smithsonian’s failure to disavow the assertions of the aerodrome’s flightworthiness deeply annoyed Orville, and he had bypassed the Smithsonian to place the Wrights’ original plane on long-term deposit at London’s Science Museum. In late 1942, however, the Smithsonian finally agreed to a public disavowal of the Langley claims, and soon after, he was writing the Science Museum of his intention to place the plane permanently at the Smithsonian where, as a prime testament to American inventiveness, it most logically belonged.

Smithsonian Institution Secretary Samuel P. Langley’s own experiments in motorized aviation climaxed with the failure of the test flights of his aerodrome in the fall of 1903, just before the Wright brothers flew at Kitty Hawk.

*By an unidentified photographer, c. 1895*

Roger D. Launius  
Chair, Division of Space History, National Air and Space Museum  

It all began with dreams. Throughout human history, we have been constantly fascinated with our natural universe, leading to our desire to learn more about it. The spaceflight pioneers worked relentlessly to make a reality out of their dreams of exploring the solar system. With the realization of spaceflight as something that could actually be accomplished, the United States went from orbiting the Earth to landing on the Moon within a decade. Following were increasingly complex robotic missions to the planets, as well as human operations in Earth orbit using the space shuttle and the International Space Station. It did not end there; mighty space telescopes have probed the depths of the universe and brought knowledge about its origins and evolution. The space age has brought us not only remarkable discoveries about our universe but also new perspectives on our home planet, changes in the way in which we live and perceive, and broader visions of our place in the cosmos.

The space age has also seen the building of great machines that are totally under human control. The power of a big rocket’s launch is daunting. Impressively on television, in person it is overwhelming, uniquely magical. Novelist Ray Bradbury once commented: “Too many of us have lost the passion and emotion of the remarkable things we’ve done in space. . . . When the blast of a rocket launch slams you against the wall and all the rust is shaken off your body, you will hear the great shout of the universe and the joyful crying of people who have been changed by what they’ve seen.” No one leaves a space shuttle—or any other launch for that matter—unchanged. The experience is thrilling and transforming.

President John F. Kennedy captured this sense of wonder in 1962 when he remarked in a speech: “We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills.”

From the beginning of the space age, the most eloquent advocates of space exploration have been a remarkably able set of American astronauts. Starting with the unveiling of the Mercury 7 in April 1959 (see page 5), Americans built up these daring individuals as giants who strode the Earth, as latter-day saviors whose purity, coupled with noble deeds, would purge this land of all evils. In large measure, they did not disappoint. James Reston of the New York Times remarked that he felt profoundly moved by the astronauts’ statements. “What made them so exciting,” he wrote, “was not that they said anything new but that they said all the old things with such fierce convictions. . . . They spoke of ‘duty’ and ‘faith’ and ‘country’ like Walt Whitman’s pioneers. . . . This is a pretty cynical town, but nobody went away from these young men scotching at their courage and idealism.”

Of all of those astronauts, no one has been more eloquent than John Glenn, the first American to orbit the Earth, in 1962. After a long career in the U.S. Senate, Glenn made a second flight on the space shuttle in 1998. In 1986 he summoned images of the American heritage of pioneering when he noted, “Space represents the modern frontier for extending humanity’s research into the unknown. Our commitment to manned programs must remain strong even in the face of adversity and tragedy. This is our history and the legacy of all who fly.”

The first fifty years of space exploration were motivated by fantastic images, and the thrill of this exploration has fostered continued attention. No one, especially not the astronauts, could remain unmoved. Apollo 17 commander Gene Cernan noted of his 1972 moon landing, “I knew that I had changed in the past three days, and that I no longer belonged solely to the Earth.” Properly conducted, space exploration can provide not only a hopeful future but also an important part of the means by which humans can learn to live on a small and precious world and to leave that world for another.
Book Review:
Rocket Man: Robert H. Goddard and the Birth of the Space Age by David A. Clary

Anne Collins Goodyear
Assistant Curator of Prints and Drawings

“The dream of yesterday is the hope of today and the reality of tomorrow,” Robert Hutchings Goddard (1882–1945) told his fellow classmates in his 1904 valedictory address at South High School in Worcester, Massachusetts. Although Goddard had not yet built the liquid-propelled rockets that would bring him fame and lay the groundwork for modern rocketry, the dream of spaceflight had long galvanized him. Five years earlier, while pruning a cherry tree, the avid reader of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells had envisioned rockets traveling from Earth to Mars. He would mark the event throughout his life as “Anniversary Day,” explaining, “I was a very different boy when I descended from the tree from when I ascended.” Goddard’s imagination and determination would ultimately earn him the support of other pioneers in aviation, including Charles Lindbergh, who took a strong interest in the future of aerial transport, and Daniel and Harry F. Guggenheim, whose philanthropy played an important role in advancing aeronautics in the United States.

The centennial of flight provides an appropriate moment to reflect upon the legacy of this rocket scientist, as David A. Clary does in Rocket Man: Robert H. Goddard and the Birth of the Space Age. Frequently grouped with the physicists Konstantin Eduardovich Tsiolkovsky of the Soviet Union and Hermann Julius Oberth of Germany, Goddard, like these visionaries, demonstrated independently that the fantasy of space travel had scientific validity. However, as Clary persuasively argues, “Goddard stands out among the three ‘fathers’ [of space flight].” Unlike the research of Tsiolkovsky and Oberth, Goddard’s study of high-altitude flight was not merely theoretical but was carried out through experimental trials. Goddard engineered the nozzles, pumps, and other equipment necessary to fire multistage rockets into the sky and even to break the sound barrier. Clary plays up the parallel between Goddard, who helped pave the way for contemporary spaceflight, and the inventors of the airplane. Reflecting upon the first successful launch of Goddard’s liquid-propelled rockets in March 1926, the author reiterates Goddard’s own comparison, arguing: “Aunt Effie’s truck farm [the site in Worcester, Massachusetts, at which the launches occurred] was the Kitty Hawk of modern rocketry, and Robert H. Goddard was its Wright Brothers.”

Clary’s celebration of Goddard’s extraordinary career does not detract from a nuanced view of the man. Clary debunks many aspects of the “legend” of Robert Goddard, such as the notion that the scientist made efforts to hide his interest in spaceflight or that he was shy about publicity. Indeed, as Clary demonstrates, from the moment of the Smithsonian Institution’s publication, in 1919, of Goddard’s early work on high-altitude rocketry, Goddard’s fame rested on his public identification with the promise of lunar travel. He even inspired the sidekick of comic-book hero Buck Rogers, Dr. Huer. However, if Goddard’s relationship with the popular press was friendlier than previously acknowledged, he had difficulty working with scientists whose work he feared encroached upon his own. Goddard’s desire to protect his reputation had the ironic effect of threatening it by creating a perception of an unwillingness to cooperate with others.

Today, while Goddard’s name is well known in the fields of aviation and space exploration, it is less familiar to the general public. Rocket Man provides a sophisticated and readable reconsideration of Goddard’s accomplishments. While refusing to engage in myth-making, Clary offers a compelling portrait of the pioneering scientist. Goddard not only imagined that people could travel from Earth to the Moon—and beyond—but showed how it could be done.
The story of Solomon Andrews (1806–1872) and his remarkable airship Aereon forms one of the more intriguing chapters in the early history of American ballooning.

Solomon Andrews was just seventeen when his casual observation of a bird in flight sparked a personal epiphany. As he watched an eagle wending its way through the air, Andrews suddenly caught “as with an electric shock, the key to the whole system of aerial flight.” Vowing some day to construct a flying machine, he focused his energies on acquiring the knowledge and resources that would enable him to realize this goal.

After graduating from Rutgers Medical College, Andrews settled in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, where he established a successful medical practice. Although he would earn praise for his work in the field of public health, it was as the intrepid inventor of at least two dozen devices—from a gas lamp to a combination lock—that Andrews built both his reputation and his fortune.

In 1847 Andrews founded an Inventor’s Institute and launched his first attempt to produce a steerable, balloon-based airship. He sought capital to fund development of his “Aerial Car,” but when investors with faith in the feasibility of aerial navigation failed to materialize, Andrews was compelled to suspend the project. It was not until the Civil War that he would renew his efforts to build a flying machine.

While serving with the Union army in 1862, Andrews became convinced that a navigable, lighter-than-air craft would prove vastly superior to the tethered balloons that were used for military reconnaissance. He resigned his commission and, at his own expense, began constructing the world’s first self-propelled, steerable airship. Comprising three cigar-shaped balloons, a rudder, and an operator’s car equipped with moveable weights, the Aereon made its maiden flight on June 1, 1863.

Employing the same principle that enables a sailboat to sail into the wind, Andrews demonstrated the Aereon’s ability to travel in any direction as he circled his craft above an incredulous crowd. Encouraged by success of his prototype, Andrews began an energetic campaign to interest federal officials in the airship the New York Herald called “the most extraordinary invention of the age.” He secured an audience with President Lincoln, petitioned Congress, and even flew a model of the Aereon in the Great Hall of the Smithsonian “Castle” for members of a special scientific commission that included Smithsonian Secretary Joseph Henry. Andrews’s efforts were unrewarded, however, for the Aereon failed to secure government backing.

After the war, Andrews established the Aerial Navigation Company to produce dirigibles capable of transporting passengers and freight. Although stock sales fell short of expectations, Andrews proceeded with construction of a redesigned, single-cylinder airship, which he unveiled in the spring of 1866. The lemon-shaped Aereon II made two crowd-pleasing exhibition flights over New York City but failed to attract additional investors. Without the capital to continue, Andrews was forced to abandon his enterprise, and the Aereon never flew again.

Robert Cornelius’s daguerreotype of Solomon Andrews is among the earliest photographic likenesses in the National Portrait Gallery’s collection. It is believed to date from 1842, the year in which the U.S. Postal Service adopted Andrews’s tamper-proof lock—a device that earned its inventor $30,000 and remains in use today.

Margaret C. S. Christman
HISTORIAN
“It is no small thing to be Doorkeeper to Posterity,” exclaimed a member of the first National Portrait Gallery Commission. The Commission, created by the 1962 legislation giving birth to the Gallery, had, in addition to its general obligation to support the objectives of the new institution, the explicit responsibility for acquisitions. Under the by-laws, the Commission would consist of up to twelve appointed members (a recent change allows for as many as twenty-five).

Initially the Regents appointed eight commissioners, chosen mainly for their interest in history, iconography, and biography. “At least one distinguished woman is needed for the Commission,” the Regents instructed, and biographer Catherine Drinker Bowen, author of the forthcoming Mira

cle at Philadelphia, was persuaded to serve. Julian Boyd, editor of the Papers of Thomas Jefferson, and Lewis Deschler, parliamentarian of the House of Representatives since 1928—a man close to Speaker Sam Rayburn and members of the Appropriations Committee—were both pleased to join. And no one was more committed than David E. Finley, the first director of the National Gallery of Art, chairman of the United States Commission of Fine Arts, and founder of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Finley had worked since the 1940s for the establishment of a National Portrait Gallery and had personally lobbied President Dwight Eisenhower to secure the Old Patent Office Building as its home. Rivaling Finley in enthusiasm was WilmARTH S. Lewis, a collector of books and prints whose life work had become the Yale edition of Horace Walpole’s correspondence. Rounding out the group were Richard H. Shyrock, a leading medical historian, and Colonel Frederick P. Todd, former director of the West Point Museum and an authority on military history. To provide expertise in American art, Edgar P. Richardson, former director of the Detroit Institute of Art and the Winterthur Museum and author of several books on art including the indispensable Painting in America, was shortly added to the Commission.

John Nicholas Brown, a Smithsonian Regent, was elected chairman. The founding Commissioners forged ahead with a belief that the Portrait Gallery “should not be considered as just another museum or research center, but should be launched as the one place in the United States where the men and women who built and developed this country come to life again for the public.”

Once the Gallery was launched in 1968, several members of the Commission departed, and Brown acknowledged it was time “to bring in new and younger people for the future.” And so they came—men and women of various backgrounds and perspectives—giving of themselves and their resources. Space here does not permit a listing of their names, let alone their contributions, but former Commissioner Robert L. McNeil Jr.’s donation to establish, in 2003, the first Edgar P. Richardson Symposium on American Portraiture represents his salute to the past and expresses his confidence in the future of the National Portrait Gallery.

Barbara Novak, the sixth person to chair the Commission, stepped down from that post this past June. (Her successor, author and former senior editorial executive at Time Inc., Daniel Okrent, will be featured in a future issue.) Novak, professor emerita of art history at Barnard College and author of American Painting of the Nineteenth Century, will stay on the Commission. “The NPG is for me a magical place,” she said, echoing the sentiments of the founders. “It’s the only place in America where American culture can be read through the faces of the people.”

Members of the first Portrait Gallery Commission (left to right): Frederick Todd, Gallery Director Charles Nagel, Catherine Drinker Bowen, John Nicholas Brown, WilmARTH S. Lewis, David E. Finley, and Richard H. Shyrock

Photograph by Leah Kopperman

Barbara Novak and fellow Commissioner
Ella M. Foshay
Photograph by Leah Kopperman
Charles Lindbergh: Symbol for an Age

David C. Ward  
**Deputy Editor, Peale Family Papers**

At about 8:00 a.m. on May 20, 1927, Charles Lindbergh took off in his monoplane, the *Spirit of St. Louis*, from a rainy airfield on Long Island. Thirty-three hours and thirty minutes later he touched down at Paris’s Le Bourget Aerodrome, successfully completing the first solo transatlantic flight. Few people saw Lindbergh take off from Roosevelt Field, but a huge throng greeted his arrival in Paris. Suspense about Lindbergh’s fate had built throughout the flight, and when he made landfall over Ireland, the excitement grew to a crescendo, a crescendo that exploded into a celebratory riot by the anxious crowd that had gathered throughout the day at Le Bourget. As Lindbergh laconically noted in his logbook, “Fuselage fabric badly torn by souvenir hunters.” The cheering crowd at the airport was only a portent of the phenomenon that became Lindbergh. So modestly uncertain of his reception that he carried with him letters of introduction, Lindbergh was instantly engulfed by a tide of worldwide fame unparalleled in modern history and for which he was totally unprepared. Shy and reticent, characteristics that only added to his public appeal, Lindbergh unsuccessfully resisted the destruction of his private persona as he watched himself being transformed into a symbolic figure on whom the public could project its dreams.

At the simplest level, in a decade obsessed with stunts and crazes, Lindbergh’s flight was the ultimate daredevil performance. It was not heavily subsidized by wealthy individuals or corporations, and he flew a small, single-engine plane manufactured by Ryan Aircraft in San Diego. Above all, Lindbergh flew alone. While this increased the risk, it was also why his flight so quickly transcended being merely a dangerous, but relatively simple, feat of airmanship; other airplanes had crossed the Atlantic but their crews received nothing of Lindbergh’s reception and enduring fame. For Americans, Lindbergh immediately was seen as the descendant of a long line of mythic and historical individuals: Lindbergh became the “Lone Eagle,” successful ancestor of Icarus. He was linked to the mythic figures in poems by Sir Walter Scott and Rudyard Kipling, whose line “He travels fastest who travels alone” seemed written for him. References to the great pioneers of American history, Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone in particular, became staples of speeches and writings about Lindbergh, a comparison only heightened by his farm-boy origins in Minnesota. Lindbergh, in other words, struck a dominant chord in American
ideology and myth: that of the lone individual striking out for new territories, encased in his own self-reliance, and dependent on no one, not even the society from whence he came. One bit of doggerel read, “No endless data, comrades, moneyed chums;/No boards, no councils, no directors grim—/He plans ALONE.” In the somewhat desperate and frenzied society of the Roaring Twenties, Lindbergh shone as a symbol not only of heroism but of the higher purpose with which Americans had historically invested their journeys across space.

The irony, of course, is that Lindbergh was not the lone scout but instead the pilot of a piece of machinery that was the epitome of modern technology and industrial processes. Lindbergh himself always attempted to give credit to his machinery, and he titled his autobiography We to show the fusion between man and machine; the flight, Lindbergh wrote, “represented American industry.” The public paid no attention. Instead, what occurred was a reaffirmation of faith in American origins, and especially that the power of nature could be surmounted, tamed, and put to use. In the symbol that he became, the heroic figure of Lindbergh was the means through which Americans could maintain their reverence for the individual while accommodating the collective powers of modern industry. Whether the seeming contradiction between the individual and the mass society can be maintained is a problem that Americans have dealt with since the formation of the national polity. The ecstatic response to Lindbergh’s flight is one indicator of how American culture has sought and succeeded in maintaining that balance.


Paul Peck Presidential Awards

On October 18, 2003, the National Portrait Gallery held the second annual Paul Peck Presidential Awards, a national program to recognize and celebrate individuals who have served the President of the United States, as well as those who have portrayed the President or the presidency in a visual or literary medium. Through the generosity of Paul Peck, who has endowed this program, the Gallery presents two awards annually. Both winners receive a $25,000 prize and a medal featuring both a profile of the Gallery’s bust of George Washington by Jean-Antoine Houdon and an eagle based on a drawing by nineteenth-century naturalist and artist Titian Ramsay Peale. In 2003, awards were presented to Thomas R. Pickering, for his service as a U.S. ambassador to nations in the most sensitive regions of the globe, and to Diana Walker, for her photographic portrayals of Presidents from the Ford through the Clinton administrations. The Honorable Strobe Talbott presented the award to Pickering. Senator Patrick J. Leahy presented the award to Walker.

Each recipient received a specially designed Smithsonian medal and a $25,000 award.

NPG Director Marc Pachter, winners Thomas R. Pickering and Diana Walker, Paul Peck, and Smithsonian Secretary Lawrence M. Small at the October 18 awards.
NATIONAL Lansdowne Tour
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
Oklahoma City Museum of Art
Featuring the famous “Lansdowne” full-length portrait of George Washington by Gilbert Stuart, “George Washington: A National Treasure” is on view at the Oklahoma City Museum of Art from December 12, 2003, through April 11, 2004. The National Portrait Gallery was able to acquire this major icon of the nation’s first President through the generosity of the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation, which also provided funding for its tour to museums across the country. Five portraits from the Gallery’s permanent collection will be lent to the Oklahoma City Museum of Art to supplement the exhibition.

Santa Fe, New Mexico
Museum of Fine Arts
To commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of ARTnews magazine, the Gallery has organized the traveling exhibition “Portrait of the Art World: A Century of ARTnews Photographs.” Included are portraits by a broad cross-section of photographers, ranging from Zaida Ben-Yusuf and Alice Boughton to contemporary masters Cindy Sherman, Arnold Newman, and Robert Mapplethorpe. Among the individuals pictured are John Singer Sargent, Pablo Picasso, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Louise Nevelson. Nationally sponsored by AXA Art Insurance Corporation, the four-city tour ends January 4, 2004, in Santa Fe.

Handheld AV Guide Available!
The National Portrait Gallery debuted a new wireless handheld audiovisual guide in conjunction with the exhibition “A Brush with History,” on view at the International Gallery on the national Mall. Available free to the public on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, the Navip@ss tour incorporates thirty-two portraits and supplemental commentary written by the Gallery’s senior historian, Frederick Voss. Also included are interviews, performances, historical audio and video footage, and other related imagery. This innovative approach to providing greater information for our visitors is a model of the technology that will be used when the Gallery reopens in 2006.

Navip@ss equipment and software provided courtesy of Soundtrack Productions, Miami, Florida

Visit the new NPG online gift shop at www.npg.si.edu!
NPG Schedules & Information

Portrait of a Nation

Tour Itinerary

A Brush with History
Final venue: International Gallery, S. Dillon Ripley Center, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
November 14, 2003–February 8, 2004

Women of Our Time: Twentieth-Century Photographs
Blackhawk Museum, Danville, California
November 14, 2003–January 11, 2004
Long Beach Museum of Art, California
February 6–April 4, 2004
Additional venues include: North Carolina Museum of History, Raleigh; George Bush Presidential Library & Museum, College Station, Texas

American Women:
A Selection from the National Portrait Gallery
George Bush Presidential Library & Museum, College Station, Texas
January 23–April 4, 2004
Additional venues include: Naples Museum of Art, Florida; Columbia Museum of Art, South Carolina

Useful Contacts

The Gallery’s mailing address is P.O. Box 37012, MRC 973, Washington, DC 20013–7012.
The main telephone number is (202) 275-1738.

Catalog of American Portraits
PHONE: (202) 275-1840
WEB: www.npg.si.edu and click on Search
E-MAIL: NPGWeb@si.edu

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PHONE: CindyLou Molnar (301) 238-2006
(e for paintings and sculpture)
E-MAIL: molnarl@npg.si.edu
PHONE: Rosemary Fallon (301) 238-2001
(for art on paper)
E-MAIL: fallonr@npg.si.edu

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PHONE: (202) 275-1912
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(e for the library’s catalog)
E-MAIL: lynaghp@si.edu

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In Memoriam

Richard E. Neustadt, professor emeritus of government at Harvard University, passed away on October 31. He was the winner of the National Portrait Gallery’s first Paul Peck Award in 2002 for portrayal of the American presidency. Professor Neustadt enjoyed the distinction of not only being a professor of government whose books were read by Presidents, but a scholar who served in presidential administrations. His magnum opus, Presidential Power, has gone through four editions and remains one of the most influential books on the modern American presidency. His deep historical perspective and balanced judgments will be missed. We at the Gallery are proud to have been associated with him.

His melding of distinctly American musical idioms with traditional classical forms inspired a critic to dub him the “American eagle of composers.”

This dancer shocked her early audiences with her sensual departures from the precepts of classical ballet.

She scandalized even a good many feminists with her assertion that organized religion was one of the great obstacles in the struggle for women’s rights.

The contour of his bald head conjures up visions of this designer’s most celebrated structural achievement.

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