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IN REVIEW



TWO BAD DAYS
Questioning conventional wisdom after Antares, Virgin Galactic/Page 4

Preserving the past

by Bill Barry

The History Technical Committee works to preserve the record of aerospace advances and recognize their impacts on modern society.

While many despair at the apparent loss of historical records covering the first century of flight and space history, a panel of **aerospace archivists** at AIAA's SciTech 2014 Forum went a long way toward dispelling the myths and providing guidance to those of us with materials that may be historically significant.


"Aerospace Archives: All is NOT Lost — Keepers of the Right Stuff," chaired by outgoing History Technical Committee Chairman Cam Martin, featured Debbie Douglas, curator of science and technology at the MIT Museum; Jane Odom, chief archivist at NASA; Dawne Dewey, head of special collections and archives at Wright State University; Marilyn Graskowiak, archivist at the National Air and Space Museum; and Elizabeth Borja, reference archivist at the National Air and Space Museum. The panelists gave particular attention to some of the highlights of the archival collections held by their organizations, both artifacts and documents. They also noted the wide variety of repositories around the United States that collect aerospace materials and their continued interest in acquiring items from individuals and organizations.

Asked what scientists and engineers should do with potentially valuable **documents and artifacts**, the panel had two unanimous messages. First, don't leave these items for your children to sort out. If you want to be sure your legacy does not wind up in a land-

fill, contact an archivist as soon as you start thinking about what you might donate. Second, don't weed out your papers yourself; let a trained archivist help you determine what is historically significant.

The claim that **Gustave Whitehead** flew a powered, controlled aircraft more than two years before the Wright brothers was discredited this year by the Historical Group of the British Royal Aeronautical Society. In 2012, Jane's All the World's Aircraft astounded many by announcing support for the claim that Whitehead flew an airplane in Connecticut in 1901. In June 2013, Connecticut Gov. Dannel Malloy signed into law a bill establishing a state Powered Flight Day honoring Whitehead as the first to fly. This effort to rewrite history was roundly dismissed by U.S. historians, including Tom Crouch, vice chairman of the AIAA History Technical Committee and AIAA Fellow. This year, the Royal Aeronautical Society added its voice to the debate by issuing a formal statement in June. Their conclusion: "All available evidence fails to support the claim that Gustave Whitehead made sustained, powered, controlled flights pre-dating those of the Wright Brothers."

With the centennial of the creation of the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics — **NACA** — coming on March 3, 2015, aerospace historians have been preparing events to mark the occasion. From 1915 until it became the institutional basis of NASA in 1958, NACA made fundamental contributions to the worldwide development of aeronautics, critical contributions to victory in World War II and security in the Cold War, and laid the basis for the Space Age. The first centennial event will be an invited panel discussion at SciTech 2015 on Jan. 6. "The NACA Centennial: An Assessment" will be chaired by Crouch and feature Roger Launius of the National Air and Space Museum, Jim Hansen of Auburn University, MIT's Douglas and Bill Barry from NASA. A number of other events, including a historical symposium at the National Air and Space Museum on March 3-4, are on the agenda for 2015.

The 2014 Gardner-Lasser Aerospace History Literature Award went to Bill Clancey for his path-breaking work on how the various teams made the Mars rovers a success in "Working on Mars: Voyages of Scientific Discovery with the Mars Exploration Rovers." The 2014 History Manuscript Award went to Lawrence R. Benson for his manuscript on supersonic boom research, "Quieting the Boom" (now a NASA publication). 



NASA

The first meeting of the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics took place on April 23, 1915. NACA will celebrate its 100th anniversary in March.