

**JPL ARCHIVES:  
PRESERVING THE HISTORY OF THE JET PROPULSION LABORATORY**  
by  
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The Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), in Pasadena, California, is managed by the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). It is the lead center for robotic exploration of the solar system. As a federally funded research and development center and NASA contractor, JPL has been at the forefront of space exploration since it joined the agency in late 1958. By the time that JPL joined NASA, the Laboratory had already established itself as a leader in aerodynamics, solid and liquid rocket propulsion systems, guidance and control systems, and systems integration due to its work for the U. S. Army Ordnance Department.

While the work of the Laboratory actually began in the 1930s, when Caltech graduate students first did rocket testing, JPL moved slowly to formally document its rich heritage. It took a major step toward this recognition in the 1960s when it hired an historian and established the History Office. The JPL Historian moved aggressively to collect significant historical information over the next ten years. Although the position was abolished in the mid-1970s, the materials that the Historian had collected were transferred to the control of the JPL Library, where they remained until the JPL Archives was formally established a decade ago.

In 1989, the Laboratory showed a renewed interest in preserving its history, and hired its first professional Archivist. Shortly afterward, the JPL Archives was established at a leased site located about 8 miles from the Laboratory. From that beginning ten years ago, the JPL Archives has actively sought to document the history of the Laboratory's flight projects, research and development activities, and administrative operations. The first order of business for the Archives was to work with the Library to transfer the collection developed by the former Laboratory Historian to the newly created Archives. While this collection serves as the core of the Archives, other historical materials continue to be added for research use by JPL and NASA employees, as well as scholars and the general public. Documentation currently is being collected in paper, microfilm, CD-ROM, audio and videotape, as well as still and moving photographic images.

What types of historical materials will researchers interested in JPL history find in the JPL Archives?

They will find the History Collection, which contains materials pertaining to the development of the Laboratory from 1936 through 1976. Included in this collection are records of Army Ordnance projects such as Corporal and Sergeant, NASA programs including Ranger, Surveyor, and Mariner, and other JPL activities.

Also, they will find audiovisual materials, which include photographs, motion picture film, videotape, and CD-ROMs. The Photograph Collection is the largest single archival collection consisting of 390,000 photographic negatives taken between 1936 and 1991. They illustrate a variety of scenes and events, such as missile launchings and the 1950's Miss Guided Missile pageants, as well as images of planetary and moon surfaces.

Researchers will find the Microfilm Collection, which contains materials pertaining to the development of the Laboratory from 1936 to the present. Within the collection of over 5,700 35mm reels are administrative reports, as well as information on both Army Ordnance and NASA projects and other programs undertaken by JPL.

The Oral History Collection provides the unique personal narrative experiences of JPL employees, which may otherwise be missed in written documents. They add to the understanding of the Laboratory's growth and development.

Last, but certainly not least, there is an ever-increasing volume of collections that pertain to NASA and other projects involving JPL. These collections of historical materials include the Earth Observing System, Galileo, Magellan, Mariner, Mars Observer, SEASAT, Viking, and Voyager projects. In addition, non-flight project records range the gamut from Information Systems to Low Cost Silicon Solar Array to Photovoltaic Array Space Power Plus Diagnostics Experiment to the Railroad Wheel Failure Mechanisms and Test Facility Project.

Bibliographic information about these and the other processed collections that are available for research use are found in BEACON-Archives, the searchable online catalog. This Web-based catalog enables researchers to find a collection or document description using title, author, document number, subject terms, or any words and phrases appearing in the catalog entry. For access to BEACON-Archives, researchers simply go to <http://beacon-archives.jpl.nasa.gov>.

In addition to the BEACON-Archives catalog, the site includes general information about Archives access, services, and collections, as well as Historical Photos and related historical sites. The digital Historical Photos section is of particular interest to researchers. In this section, a specific *Historical Photo of the Month* is highlighted, along with a caption describing the photograph. These are drawn from the Archives Photograph Collection, and are used to illustrate events in JPL's history. Along with the current photograph, *Past Photos of the Month* are preserved, so those researchers can go back to the 1996 set, when this feature was first introduced. Thumbnails and enlargements with captions are provided for each photograph, as well as a subject index. High quality print reproductions of these photographs can be ordered through the JPL Archives by providing the number that accompanies each image.

What types of historical information are researchers seeking from the JPL Archives? Recent requests have included information and images for the following: Corporal, WAC Corporal, and Bumper WAC rockets; JPL organizational history; Voyager Project; scientific instruments on a spacecraft; and launch vehicles.

The JPL Archives, which is now operated under contract by Sherikon Space Systems, is open for research from 7:30 am to 4:30 pm (Pacific Time) Monday through Friday, and is closed during all regular JPL-observed holidays. Visits are by appointment only. Researchers planning a visit are expected to notify the Archives of their research topic in advance. The Archives is located in Pasadena, California, and the mailing address is JPL Archives, 145 N. Altadena Dr., Pasadena, CA 91106. The telephone number is (626) 449-1597, x15. E-mail can be directed to [jplarchives@sherikon.com](mailto:jplarchives@sherikon.com).

\*Certified Archivist Dr. Hooks, who has been with JPL since 1989, is the JPL Chief Archivist. In addition, he serves as the Laboratory's Records Manager and history representative to the NASA History Office. He can be reached at [michael.q.hooks@jpl.nasa.gov](mailto:michael.q.hooks@jpl.nasa.gov) or M/S: 111-113, Jet Propulsion Laboratory, 4800 Oak Grove Dr., Pasadena, CA 91109-8099.