



← Historical documents from the NASA Glenn Archives. (Photo credit: NASA/Bob Arrighi)

Glenn Archives Marks 25th Anniversary

» By Robert Arrighi, NASA Historian and Archivist

IN DECEMBER 1986, historian Virginia Dawson wrote to NASA management, “As a professional historian and contractor for a book-length history of Lewis Research Center [today, NASA Glenn], I would like to bring to your attention the need for a Lewis Archives. It is extremely important that documentation concerning the center’s contributions to the history of aircraft and space propulsion not be lost.”¹ Subsequently, historian Michael Gorn noted that the center’s lack of an archives forced him to omit most of its extensive flight research activities from his book *Expanding the Envelope: Flight Research at NACA and NASA*.

At the time, the center’s only dedicated history presence was a point of contact for the Headquarters History program. When that person requested to be relieved of his history duties in early

1991, center management decided to elevate the role and selected technical editor Sheree Sievert for the new History Coordinator position. She had no formal background in the field but had recently written a 20-page overview of Lewis’s history to mark the center’s 50th anniversary.

Under the guidance of NASA’s new chief historian, Roger Launius, Sievert became the first center employee to take an active role in the agency’s history program. While maintaining her primary duties as an editor, Sievert attended the annual NASA History meeting, wrote articles on historical topics for the center newsletter, and began informally acquiring historical materials for preservation. Her office became home for historical newsletters, directories, biographies, and photographs.

When Sievert left the agency in 1993, the position was filled by another editor, Charles Perich. Perich maintained and added to what was referred to as “the Historical Documents Collection” before retiring in 1996. He was succeeded by the center’s records manager, Kevin Coleman.

In an effort to raise local awareness of the NASA history program, the agency decided to hold its History Advisory Panel meeting at Glenn in October 1998. The meeting covered an array of topics, including new Glenn-related book projects. Afterward, Associate Administrator of the Office of Policy and Plans Lori Garver thanked Center Director Donald Campbell for his support. “I am pleased that the success of this meeting encouraged you to give history a higher profile at Lewis.” That fall, Coleman was named history officer, and the center began a search for a full-time archivist.

The Glenn History Collection formally began in February 1999 with the hiring of Bonita Smith as archivist. Smith began cataloging the 200 boxes of historical materials that had been previously collected, networking with retirees, and conducting oral histories. She actively acquired materials from various center organizations, records management, and retirees. In November 2000, the historical materials were relocated from lektriers in a warehouse to a dedicated archival area in the basement of the Library Services Building.

Glenn Archives Marks 25th Anniversary (continued)

During this period, Coleman facilitated the acquisition of key collections, including former Center Director Abe Silverstein's personal papers and NACA-era Director's Office correspondence. He also oversaw several contract history projects, a centennial-of-flight symposium, and a series of documentation projects to mitigate the loss of historic facilities. In 2005, Coleman received the very first NASA History Award for his contributions.

A series of personnel changes ensued. Bob Arrighi, who had spent the previous two years as a Glenn subcontractor, was hired as a second archivist in 2003 but was soon tasked with the historic mitigation projects. Smith left the agency in early 2004 and was replaced by Eleanor Blackman. Anne Mills began as a co-op student in 2004 and took over as records manager and history officer following Coleman's retirement in 2008. In this role, Mills has steadfastly provided the History Office with the opportunity to review documents under the Records Management purview.

↓ Boxes of documents from former Glenn Director Edward R. Sharp. (Photo credit: NASA/Bob Arrighi)



The History Collection continued to grow in the late 2000s, including the acquisition of a large 16-millimeter film collection. In 2008, the processed History Collection was relocated to the Glenn Science and Engineering Library's new modern location in the Research Analysis Center, while the unprocessed materials and films were moved into empty test cells in the Engine Research Building.

Following Blackman's departure in early 2008, Arrighi began balancing archival work with his historical documentation and research activities. It was around this time that the History Office obtained a scanner, and the digital collection began expanding exponentially. The majority of the processed collections have subsequently been digitized and large quantities of born-digital records have been acquired.

Today, the Glenn History Collection is known as the Glenn Archives and contains documents from the Director's Office; center newsletters; press releases; NACA Inspection books; materials regarding the Centaur, space station power system, and various aer propulsion programs; oral histories; and the personal papers of Abe Silverstein, John Sloop, Bruce Lundin, Irving Pinkel, and others. The Glenn Archives also includes films, audio recordings, three-dimensional objects, and artwork. A number of collections have recently been incorporated into NASA's Virtual Archives, available to the agency's employees.

As a result of the agency's transition to an enterprise-based organization, the Glenn History Office became part of the new History and Archives Division



↑ Archived records held in Building 142 at NASA Glenn. (Photo credit: NASA/Bob Arrighi)

in NASA's Office of Communications in October 2022.

Since its establishment 25 years ago, the Glenn Archives has grown dramatically. Its materials have supported the creation of an array of books, articles, and websites; provided information that has influenced center decision-making; and furnished answers to countless reference requests. ■

Visit the [Glenn History website](#)

Endnote

- 1 Virginia Dawson to Lynn Bondurant, "Archives for Lewis Research Center," 3 December 1986, NASA Glenn Archives. Dawson's NASA Lewis center history, *Engines and Innovation: Lewis Laboratory and American Propulsion Technology*, was published in 1991.