Sources and Research Materials

Marshall Space Flight Center’s documentary collections relating its history are uneven, primarily because the Center had no history office from 1975 until 1986. When the office closed, Marshall sent many of these documents to the National Archives annex in Atlanta, and retrieval is complicated because shelf lists are incomplete and some of the documents have apparently been lost.

Today, Marshall’s historical documents are in several collections. Most important are the History Archives, housed in Building 4203. This collection is built around a collection formerly used as a resource by the Office of the Center Director. It contains correspondence, Weekly Notes, official documents, and other records relating to projects, management, institutional issues, and other Centers, Headquarters, and other issues of interest to top management. The History Office, located in Building 4200, has a wide range of documents and other resources (including videotapes) collected since the office reopened in 1986, but covering all periods of Marshall’s history. Many of the key documents are available on fiche. The histories of Marshall’s involvement in Shuttle and Space Station have been documented by a contractor under the supervision of the history office. The Shuttle and Station materials include documents, annotated chronologies, and interviews.

Other collections on the Center and at the adjacent Redstone Arsenal have information on Marshall’s history. The Marshall Document Repository houses technical documents on the Center’s projects. The Redstone Scientific Information center is an Army regional library with a rich collection of documents, publications, and on-line retrieval systems. The Arsenal also has its own history office, which has information on pre-Marshall ABMA missile development in Huntsville.
Two other sites in Huntsville contain information on Marshall. The Space and Rocket Center holds documents of some retirees from Marshall, including many of the original German team. The Special Collections Department of the library at the University of Alabama in Huntsville houses a collection of materials assembled for Roger Bilstein’s book on Saturn. The Saturn collection has interviews, technical and managerial documents, and brochures from prime contractors.

Because the two Centers have worked together on most of NASA’s major human spaceflight projects, the history office at the Johnson Space Center in Houston has many resources relating to Marshall’s history, including chronological document collections relating to Mercury, Apollo, Skylab (housed at the Fondren Library at Rice University), Shuttle, and Space Station. Several Houston projects over the years have conducted interviews, and many of these discuss Marshall. Many of the collections of the NASA Headquarters history office in Washington have information on Marshall. A vertical file containing an extensive clipping file and numerous documents includes biographical files on key NASA personnel, program files, and files on each of the NASA Centers. The office also has the papers of several NASA administrators and deputy administrators; the Fletcher and Myers papers in particular have material relating to Marshall. Management and administrative collections also bear on Marshall’s history.

Other sites in Washington also have useful materials. The Space Division of the National Air and Space Museum has interviews Robert Smith conducted for his book on the Hubble Space Telescope. In addition, the National Archives houses the records of the presidential commission that investigated the Challenger accident. The commission records contain over one hundred interviews undertaken by the investigation staff and thousands of documents on over seventy reels of microfilm.

Most prominent among the publications dealing with the origins of Marshall Space Flight Center are those dealing with the Germans who came to Huntsville as a result of Operation Paperclip. The authors of most of these works were people who knew and worked with Wernher von Braun; these works comprise what historian Rip Bulkeley called the “Huntsville school” of aerospace history. The best of these works are Ernst Stuhlinger and Frederick I. Ordway III, Wernher von Braun, Crusader for Space: A Biographical Memoir (Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company, 1994) and Ordway and Mitchell R. Sharpe, The Rocket Team (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1979). Michael Neufeld’s The
Rocket and the Reich (New York: Basic Books, 1994), published as this book entered its final review process, is the most scholarly study of the German World War II missile program at Peenemünde. Neufeld shared many of his insights and allowed us to see chapters of his work in progress.


Although many books discuss the Apollo Program, few cover MSFC in any detail. By far the most detailed history of the Center in the 1960s is Roger Bilstein’s Stages to Saturn: A Technological History of Apollo/Saturn NASA SP–4206 (Washington, DC, 1980). The book is especially valuable because many of the documents that Bilstein used have since been lost. Other


Although it concentrates more on documents generated at Houston and Headquarters, the voluminous six-volume “Shuttle Chronology, 1964–1973”
Sources and Research Materials

edited by John F. Guilmartin, Jr., and John Walker Mauer, JSC Management Analysis Office, 1988, has many documents that relate to Marshall’s role in early Shuttle development.


Howard E. McCurdy’s The Space Station Decision: Incremental Politics and Technological Choice (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) examines the political struggle to win approval for NASA’s “next logical step.” Adam L. Gruen’s The Port Unknown: A History of the Space Station Freedom Program (NASA SP–4217, 1995) examines from a Washington perspective the politics, budgets, and configuration changes that characterized Space Station Freedom’s developmental rollercoaster.