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Dear Neil Armstrong: Letters to the First Man from All Mankind

James R. Hansen

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*Dear Neil
Armstrong*

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Dear Neil Armstrong

Letters to the
First Man from
All Mankind

James R. Hansen

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Letters featured in this volume are from the Neil A. Armstrong papers in the Barron Hilton Flight and Space Exploration Archives, Purdue University Archives and Special Collections.

*To all of the people who wrote letters to Neil—
it is to their respect, admiration, and fascination
with him that I dedicate this book*

Neil Armstrong
APOLLO 11

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FOREWORD

Throughout history there have been ordinary men and women who accomplished extraordinary things. Neil Armstrong was one of those. As an experimental test pilot for NASA, he flew the X-15 at Edwards Air Force Base, going higher and faster than anyone before him, flying to the edge of space. And then he transferred to the astronaut program so that he could fly in space.

I was a member of the fifth selection group of astronauts in 1966 and arrived in Houston in May of that year, just two months after the flight of Gemini 8. Neil had been the commander on that flight, which ran into trouble when the attitude control thrusters fired suddenly, causing the spacecraft to tumble. Both the Gemini 8 and crew could have been lost that day, but a coolheaded Neil got the spacecraft under control.

When I arrived that May the talk was all about how Neil had saved the flight. And since I was already excited about being assigned to the Manned Space Center, all that talk about Gemini 8 only served to get my heart going faster. My introduction to Neil was the result of our being on the same floor at the MSC, and I saw him only intermittently in my early days there. Busy with post-Gemini 8 responsibilities, Neil was not in the office much. But he was quick to introduce himself and welcome me, showing friendly support for my new assignment to the Astronaut Office. I felt honored to meet him.

There is an old saying that the ultimate test pilot is the one who, when faced with certain death, calmly reads out the instruments before crashing.

DEAR NEIL ARMSTRONG

Without a doubt the ability to keep a cool head is a preeminent characteristic of great test pilots. Neil Armstrong certainly demonstrated that, as witnessed by the way he both saved Gemini 8 and landed the lunar module on July 20, 1969. During the descent to the Moon an onboard computer overload caused a series of alarms to sound. Then as the lunar module *Eagle* dropped closer to the surface, Neil saw that the area they were headed toward was rocky and knew he must find a more open area in which to land. As *Eagle* approached 500 feet he took manual control, and with lowered visibility from a layer of lunar dust kicked up by the descent engine and a dwindling fuel supply, he successfully landed the lunar module in the Sea of Tranquility.

Neil Armstrong was often described as stoic, but that was not my experience of him. Although I did not know him in an intimate, familiar way, we were friends, and we got to know one another better after the Apollo program ended. While I served as chairman of the Astronaut Scholarship Foundation and as such focused on raising money for that organization, Neil focused on raising funds for Purdue. But he was always ready to speak at ASF events, and at an anniversary celebration for Apollo 15, for which I served as the command module pilot, he showed his warmth and grace as he spoke about the importance of the CMP role during the Apollo program, giving much credit to Michael Collins, his CMP and second in command on Apollo 11.

I hope you enjoy these samplings of the many thousands of letters and well-wishes Neil received, and responded to, from people all over the world. Though they are thoroughly enjoyable in their own right, through them we gain insight into the First Man and what he meant to so many.

Al Worden
July 2019

PREFACE

Among the items the crew of Apollo 11 left on the Moon was a tiny silicon disc about the size of a half-dollar. Etched onto that disc, in microscopic lettering about one-fourth the width of a human hair, were messages of goodwill from seventy-four leaders of the world's nations, messages that had been rather hurriedly solicited by NASA (after authorization by the U.S. State Department) just weeks before the launch of Apollo 11. Also etched on the disc were four presidential statements: from then current U.S. president Richard M. Nixon and the immediate past U.S. president Lyndon B. Johnson, plus quotes from the National Aeronautics and Space Act of 1958, signed by Dwight D. Eisenhower, and John F. Kennedy's May 25, 1961, lunar landing commitment speech to Congress. The disc also contained the names of various members of the U.S. Congress who had served on committees instrumental to the achievement of the Apollo program, as well as the names of the leading NASA manned space program officials. In truth, NASA had contacted 116 countries asking for their contributions to the historic disc of goodwill messages, but the deadline for producing the disc came so fast that not all were able to get their messages back to NASA in time.

As the goodwill messages were not written expressly for Neil Armstrong, nor for his crewmates, nor for NASA, and most of them not even directly for the United States of America, it may seem unusual to use them as the basis of the introduction to this book dedicated to Armstrong's letters. But in another respect these messages are the perfect way to lead the reader into the contents, and the spirit, of this book.

For one thing, Neil Armstrong commanded the mission that took the disc to the Moon. But more than that, if not for Neil the small beat cloth package containing the disc, preserved within a thin aluminum case, might not have been left on the Moon, at least not during Apollo 11. The package was in the shoulder pocket of Buzz Aldrin, Neil's lunar module pilot and fellow Moonwalker, who had been so busy with his tasks on his EVA (extravehicular activity) that he had completely forgotten about leaving the package on the surface. Buzz was halfway up the ladder heading back into the lunar module *Eagle* when Neil, still down on the surface, called up to him, "How about that package out of your sleeve? Get that?" Buzz pulled the packet out and tossed it down onto the surface, at which point Neil gave it a nudge with his foot, straightening it out a little and getting some dust off it.

Thus, the Apollo 11 silicon disc was gifted to the Moon and, of course, rests in that place today, hopefully never to be moved (or removed) by future lunar explorers. Along with the disc in that cloth bag were a few other highly significant mementos. There was an embroidered patch from the never-launched Apollo 1 mission, in memory of fellow astronauts Roger Chaffee, Gus Grissom, and Edward White, who died when their command module caught fire during a routine test on the launch pad at Cape Kennedy in January 1967. Also in the bag were two Soviet-made medals, in honor of pioneering Soviet cosmonauts Yuri Gagarin, the first human in space, who had died in a MiG-15 accident in March 1967, and Vladimir Komarov, killed a month after Gagarin at the conclusion of his Soyuz 1 flight when his spacecraft's descent parachute failed to open. Inside there was also a gold replica of an olive branch, a symbol of peace.

All seventy-four messages of goodwill on the Apollo 11 disc are notable and merit the recollection of our global community, now fifty years since they were expressed. For the purpose of this book, and a reasonably brief preface, however, a sampling of these messages must suffice. What follows then is a suite of historic messages, resting now for half a century on our Moon's Sea of Tranquility, from our planet's seven continents (less Antarctica), sent in peace and hopeful of a better future, three each from Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America, and three from Australia in company with the islands of Oceania—a total of twenty-one messages. In choosing which messages to include, I have done my best to put myself in the frame of mind of Neil Armstrong and the kind of goodwill messages that would likely have impressed him the most in July 1969 as well as today.

AFRICA

From W. V. S. Tubman, president of Liberia

“It is extraordinary, almost incredible that what was but an idea, even a little over a decade ago, seems now an attainable reality. Man’s imagination, ingenuity and technology have not only impelled him to look up but has also enabled him to reach the celestial bodies.

“The journey to the Moon which these three Americans, Commander Neil Armstrong, Colonel Edwin E. Aldrin, Jr., and Lt. Colonel Michael Collins have successfully undertaken is a voyage to the celestial and these messengers of discovery represent the people of every country.

“We salute these explorers of outer space and pray for their security and safety while we admire their courage and intrepidity.

“I ask them to bear this message to the inhabitants of the Moon if they find any there. If they do not, it is my desire that this message be one of the greetings from the people of Liberia and myself to the Moon, nebulous satellite of the Earth.”

From J. D. Mobutu, president of the Congo

“The government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo follows with constant attention the achievements of human genius in the conquest of space in order to make man its master. The Congolese people, its party, its government, and myself express our ardent wish to see Apollo 11 successfully accomplish the mission which is our own. May these victories which have cost man so much energy and sacrifice continue to the reinforcement of cooperation among peoples and serve peace for the greatest good of mankind. Best regards.”

From Félix Houphouët-Boigny, president of the Ivory Coast

“At the moment when man’s oldest dream is becoming a reality, I am very thankful for NASA’s kind attention in offering me the services of the first human messenger to set foot on the Moon and carry the words of the Ivory Coast.

“I would hope that when this passenger from the sky leaves man’s imprint on lunar soil, he will feel how proud we are to belong to the generation which has accomplished this feat.

“I also hope that he would tell the Moon how beautiful it is when it illuminates the nights of the Ivory Coast.

“I especially wish that he would turn towards our planet Earth and cry out how insignificant the problems which torture men are, when viewed from up there.

“May his work, descending from the sky, find in the Cosmos the force and light which will permit him to convince humanity of the beauty of progress in brotherhood and peace.”

ASIA

From Indira Gandhi, prime minister of India

“On this unique occasion when man traverses outer space to set foot on Earth’s nearest neighbor, Moon, I send my greetings and good wishes to the brave astronauts who have launched on this great adventure. I fervently hope that this event will usher in an era of peaceful endeavor for all mankind.”

From Park Chung-hee, president of the Republic of Korea (South Korea)

“The landing on the Moon by Apollo 11 is a brilliant feat of all mankind which makes men’s dreams a reality and marks a new chapter of human history. This great achievement is a result of man’s constant striving for progress towards a brighter destiny. Now, realization of man’s adventure into yet further reaches of space seems but a few steps away.

“On this historic occasion, we do solemnly pledge ourselves to work together on this Earth for the better world with lasting peace and prosperity for all mankind. Let us celebrate the first landing of men on the Moon, the symbol of eternal grace and the mirror of man’s true heart, with a new spirit which will inspire mankind to realize the ideal of civilization in which men live in justice, freedom, and unity.”

From Cevdet Sunay, president of Turkey

“I consider the landing of the men on the Moon as a sign of the beginning of a new era of which we could hardly dream until now.

“Since the start of the space explorations, the Turkish nation has most ardently wished the realization of this thousand-year old dream and followed with great hope and excitement every success in this field.

“I wish to congratulate the most heartily the heroic astronauts and the

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American people, our friends and allies, for they have spared no effort in this field and also those who have contributed to the achievement of this outstanding accomplishment from which, I am sure, mankind and our civilization will benefit for peaceful purposes.”

AUSTRALIA AND OCEANIA

From John Gorton, prime minister of Australia

“Australians are pleased and proud to have played a part in helping to make it possible for the first man from earth to land on the moon. This is a dramatic fulfillment of man’s urge to go ‘always a little further,’ to explore and know the formerly unknown; to strive, to seek, and to find, and not to yield. May the high courage and the technical genius which made this achievement possible be so used in the future that mankind will live in a universe in which peace, self-expression, and the chance of dangerous adventure are available to all.”

From Keith J. Holyoake, prime minister of New Zealand

“By this flight man has finally fulfilled the ambition of setting foot on another celestial body. As Prime Minister of New Zealand I hope that the realization of this dream—so long remote—will inspire all those who set their sights high and thus bring closer the dreams of peace and cooperation for all mankind.”

From Seewoosagar Ramgoolam, prime minister of Mauritius

“Your bold venture commands admiration of government and people of Mauritius wish you God’s speed and happy perfect landing. Safe return.”

EUROPE

From Elizabeth R., queen of England

“Message from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

“On behalf of the British people I salute the skill and courage which have brought man to the moon. May this endeavor increase the knowledge and well-being of mankind.”

From Baudouin, king of the Belgians

“Now that, for the very first time, man will land on the moon, we consider this memorable event with wonder and respect.

“We feel admiration and confidence towards all those who have cooperated in this performance, and especially towards the three courageous men who take with them our hopes, as well as those from all nations, who were their forerunners or who will follow them in space.

“With awe we consider the power with which man has been entrusted and the duties which devolve on him.

“We are deeply conscious of our responsibility with respect to the tasks which may be open to us in the universe, but also to those which remain to be fulfilled on this earth, so to bring more justice and more happiness to mankind.

“May God help us to realize with this new step in world history better understanding between nations and a closer brotherhood between men.”

From Américo de Deus Rodrigues Thomaz, president of Portugal

“The Portuguese people, discoverers of the unknown Earth in centuries past, know how to admire those who in our days explore outer space bringing mankind in contact with other worlds.”

NORTH AMERICA

From Pierre Elliott Trudeau, prime minister of Canada

“Man has reached out and touched the tranquil moon. Puisse ce haut fait permettre a l’homme de redécouvrir la terre et d’u trouver la paix. (May that high accomplishment allow man to rediscover the Earth and find peace.)”

From Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, president of Mexico

“It is an honor for Mexico, with this most modest symbolic testimony, to form part of the event which for the first time takes man to a soil away from his home planet. And, in doing so, Mexico extends most enthusiastic congratulations to the dedicated, gallant astronauts and to the scientists and technicians, as well as, in a broader sense, to the American people and

their Government for this undertaking that, hitherto, only had precedents in the realm of imagination.

“Mexico’s very own emblem—its traditional seal—with the eagle and the serpent, already embodies the double sign inspiring man since his remote origins and which in a particular manner may be equated to coming humanity: the serpent represents flight, undaunted and far-seeing, a fearless pilgrimage which makes it possible for the legacy of the centuries to reach ever increasing circling horizons. Far from being contradictory to each other, both images are complementary and placed together reflect our temporal, earthly nature and the visions which nurture all progress.

“In 1492, the discovery of the American Continent transformed geography and the course of human events. Today, conquest of ultraterrestrial space—with its attendant unknowns—recreates our perspectives and enhances our paradigms.

“Mexico, while expressing its hope that this human achievement will result in good for mankind and that all the peoples on Earth will participate in its fulfillment with clear conscience of their common destiny, for the development of this new stage, offers not a power nor a richness it does not possess but the moral heritage decanted from its own history: an unquenchable thirst for material and spiritual improvement and an unyielding faith in the supremacy of reason and justice as a way and an inspiration for human conduct which now has attained a new far reaching responsibility.”

From J. J. Trejos Fernandez, president of Costa Rica

“I join in the wish of all Costa Ricans for the success of the historical exploit to be carried out by Apollo 11, in that it represents the scientific and technical progress attained by man in his peaceful struggle for the conquest of space and in that the crew of this ship represents human valor, will, spirit of adventure and ingenuity.

“The enormous scientific and technical effort deployed in order to take the first men to the moon deserves the gratitude of mankind because from this effort will come new benefits for improving the well-being of the human race.

“With faith we hope for better days for all mankind if there is later added to this successful endeavor—new determination for justice and liberty, as they correspond to the respect owed each human being and in favor of a major diffusion of love of one’s neighbor, whose efforts we can

DEAR NEIL ARMSTRONG

hope will be stimulated by the spirit of humanity derived from a more clear and vivid awareness of the minuteness of this planet, which serves as our home in the cosmos.

“As representative of the Costa Rican nation, I extend my greetings to the heroes of Apollo 11 and to all those who are making this historical feat possible.”

SOUTH AMERICA

From Artur da Costa e Silva, president of Brazil

“In rejoicing together with the government and the people of the United States of America for the event of the century, I pray God that this brilliant achievement of science remain always at the service of peace and of mankind.”

From Carlos Lleras Restrepo, president of Colombia

“As you prepare to undertake one of the most extraordinary feats in history, I wish to send to you on behalf of the people and the Government of Colombia, a warm greeting with our wishes for the complete success of your mission. I also want to express the admiration of all Colombians for your personal heroism, for the scientists and technicians that have contributed their knowledge to this enterprise and for the great North American nation whose support has made possible a project that only yesterday appeared to be unfeasible.

“Please leave on the moon along with the other objects that will bear witness of man’s first arrival to our satellite, this message, as a symbol of friendship between Colombia and the United States.

“You will descend upon the moon on our national holiday, when we observe the 159th anniversary of our independence. We, in Colombia, will be honoring the memory of the patriots that changed the course of our history on the same day when you will be writing an immortal page in the annals of mankind.”

From Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, prime minister of Guyana

“To those coming after: We cannot tell on what future day—beings of

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our own kind or perhaps from some other corner of the cosmos, will come upon this message but for those coming after, we wish to record three things:

“First, we salute these astronauts, the first two of our human race who with faith and courage have voyaged far beyond the familiar limits of our earthly home to the Moon. It is certain that their mission ushers in the greatest adventure of life since its primeval beginnings on this planet, Earth.

“Second, as members of our human race thus thrust among the stars, we pledge ourselves to work towards ensuring that the technology which has made it possible and the resources which may be discovered will be used for the benefit of all mankind irrespective of terrestrial divisions of race or creed or levels of development.

“Third and finally, we wish to set down the facts about the people for whom I speak. We are a small nation of some 700,000 souls living on the shoulder of South America in a country some 83,000 square miles in area. Our ancestors came from nearly every corner of the planet Earth and our people today profess a variety of creeds and of ways of living. But in a world in which divisions deepen and where too often one man’s hand is set against his brother, we are proud that we have given to our time an example of how out of diversity we have made one people, one nation—with one destiny.

“By working out this destiny, we have developed institutions based on the recognition of the equality of all men, forms of government in which all can participate and a system of justice which protects the weak. With the help of friendly nations, and working together, we are embarking on the challenging task of abolishing disease and poverty from our midst, and of developing our economy so that it can support a worthy level of living for our people. We have, likewise, striven hard to ensure that men everywhere are free to determine their own way of life.

“We do not know what shall be the judgment of history but we would be well pleased if on some later day when this is read, it is said of us that we strove greatly to advance the dignity of all men.”

Besides the eighteen nations from six continents whose letters are quoted above, fifty-three additional nations sent goodwill messages that came to be etched on the Apollo 11 silicon disc. In alphabetical order they were, from *Africa*: Dahomey (today known as the Republic of Benin),

Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, Morocco, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland, Togo, Tunisia, Upper Volta (known since 1984 as Burkina Faso), Zambia; from *Asia*: Afghanistan, Republic of China (Taiwan), Iran, Israel, Japan, Laos, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam); from *Europe*: Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Vatican, Yugoslavia (comprising today's states of Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Slovenia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Kosovo); from *North America*: Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama; from *South America*: Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay. Seven more countries sent in goodwill letters to NASA but they arrived too late to be included on the silicon disc. They came from Gabon, in Africa; from Ceylon (Sri Lanka), in Asia; from Finland, West Germany, Poland, and Sweden in Europe; and from Bolivia, in South America.

Interestingly, among the goodwill letters, a handful came from countries that were part of the so-called Eastern Bloc, the group of socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe that were satellite states of the Soviet Union. Letters were sent to NASA by Poland's ambassador to the United States Jerzy Michalowski; by Romanian president Nicolae Ceaușescu; and by Yugoslavia's president Josip Broz Tito. Two of the USSR's Baltic republics, annexed under protest by the Soviet Union after World War II, also sent letters for the disc. From Estonia came a letter from veteran diplomat Ernst Jaakson, and from Latvia came one from the head of the Latvian diplomatic service, Anatols Dinbergs.

Given the Cold War rivalries of the period, it should come as no surprise that no letters came from the People's Republic of China or the Soviet Union—the latter, of course, America's main rival during the Space Race era. The subject of Soviet interest in Apollo 11 will be covered in a later chapter that includes correspondence between different Soviet citizens and institutions that were sent to Neil Armstrong in the months and years following the first Moon landing. As readers will discover, Neil and his crewmates had many friends behind the Iron Curtain. Neil in particular was greatly admired by thousands in the communist world—not just for his being a distinguished astronaut and the first man on the Moon but also for his personal integrity and respectful, self-effacing character—whether or not they could publicly say so at the time.

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When in the years 2002 to 2005 I was researching and writing *First Man: The Life of Neil A. Armstrong* (Simon and Schuster, first published in November 2005), I had very little access to Armstrong's correspondence. Especially not to his personal correspondence, which was in Neil's own secure possession either in the basement of his home in suburban Cincinnati or in storage spaces he had been renting for many years in nearby Lebanon, Ohio, a rural community where for some twenty years Neil and his family (with his first wife Janet Shearon Armstrong and sons Rick and Mark) had lived on a farm.

Certainly Neil gave me by far more direct access to him and his materials than any other writer or historian before me, including the opportunity to tape-record interviews with him for a total of some fifty-five hours conducted over several months. During this time I did see many of his papers but relied primarily on the multitude of documents relevant to Neil that existed in various NASA, military, and university archives. The fact was, Neil was Neil—a very private man—and he shared with me only a small fraction of the letters, cards, emails, and other correspondence he had received, and himself written, over the course of his life, and those items I did see were always what Neil chose to share with me. I never had free, direct, or unrestricted access to his personal papers. The same was true when I put *First Man* into a second edition shortly following his death in August 2012. So, I always regarded my biography of Neil—as lengthy as it was, over 700 pages—as incomplete, and in some respects not very well informed.

Neil began donating small parts of his collection to his alma mater in 2008, but the entirety of his papers did not come to Purdue until after his death. As soon as she was able to proceed, considering the very deep grief she felt following her husband's death, Carol Held Knight Armstrong, Neil's wife since 1994, did her absolute best to help Purdue archivists carry out Neil's intention for his papers to be delivered to West Lafayette. It turned out to be a very sizable collection, with 350-plus archival boxes stuffed full with Armstrong materials arriving on the Purdue campus. Neil's bequest included technical documents, coursework, NASA working papers and subject files, writings and notes, scripts for speeches, photographs and newspaper clippings, and a wide range of material related not just to Neil's years

as an astronaut but to his college education, navy career, training and career as a test pilot, career as a professor of engineering, and later roles as advisor and board member for various industries, businesses, and commissions.

Today the Neil A. Armstrong papers collection is a treasured legacy within the Purdue University Archives and Special Collections' larger Barron Hilton Flight and Space Exploration Archives, established in 2011 with generous support from Mr. Barron Hilton and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. The Hilton Archives incorporates not just Armstrong's papers but also the papers of a number of prominent engineers, aviation professionals, scholars, and astronauts, including Purdue graduate Eugene Cernan, the last man to walk on the Moon. It is a historically significant aerospace collection second to none at an American university, one that features a deep fount of primary source materials on the history and development of powered flight. It is also a unique archive in that it dates back to an inaugural gift to Purdue, in 1940, of the papers of pioneering aviator Amelia Earhart, gifted by her husband, George Palmer Putnam. From the Earhart donation, the materials housed at Purdue related to the history of flight grew steadily over the next eighty years as new generations of Purdue faculty and alumni added their contributions to the development of aerospace sciences and associated flight technologies.

For four straight summers from 2015 to 2018, I resided for many days in the Purdue archives, taking a very close look at the Armstrong papers, really fully for the first time. Quickly I became especially fascinated with the approximately 70,000 pieces of fan mail, which Neil had begun to receive in high volume following the Moon landing and that kept coming to him, in bulk, from all around the world, for the rest of his life. Thanks to the good graces of archivists Sammie Morris and Tracy Grimm, I managed to browse all of that correspondence, determined to find the most insightful and fascinating letters written to Neil, as well as a representative sampling of his replies.

The result of my efforts is the book you have in hand, with the letters arranged into chapters according to coherent themes. Most letters are annotated to add context and content to the letters, letter writers, or Neil's response. Some appear as a series of letters, when the exchange of correspondence grew beyond just single letters to Neil and back. Mostly I let the letters speak for themselves and allow readers to draw their own conclusions and arrive at their own insights. But occasionally I insert my

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own analysis and interpretations upon a piece of correspondence, especially when I believe we need to explore its social and cultural meaning. Certainly it is my own conclusion that the letters ultimately tell us more about ourselves than they do about Neil. The letters illuminate what we wanted from, what we expected from, and what we believed about, fairly or unfairly, our “world iconic hero,” Neil Armstrong.

Readers should also be aware that this book is not the last word on Neil Armstrong’s letters. The thematic coverage of this book does not come close to covering all the major topics found in the Armstrong correspondence. In the coming months I will work with the Purdue University Press to publish at least one additional book of letters, which will contain thematic chapters focusing on the subjects of religion and belief, conspiracy theories and UFOlogy, correspondence with astronauts, space program officials, and notables from the world of aviation, and Neil’s contacts and experiences in the corporate world of business and finance.

This book of letters adds many new insights into the life and times of Neil Armstrong, providing tidbits and informational items. Reading the letters has not changed any of my essential interpretations of Neil’s biography, but it has extended and deepened my knowledge of his life in many worthwhile and exciting ways. It has certainly strengthened my feeling for the spot-on appropriateness of the epigraph I used for my book *First Man* with its original publication in 2005. The quote came in the form of a powerful thought from the American scholar Joseph Campbell: “The privilege of a lifetime is being who you are.”

Without the generous help and support of Tracy Grimm, associate head of Archives and Special Collections and the Barron Hilton Archivist for Flight and Space Exploration; Sammie Morris, Purdue university archivist and head of Archives and Special Collections; Katherine Purple, editorial, design, and production manager at the Purdue University Press; and Justin Race, the director of the Purdue University Press, this book could not have materialized at all, let alone as beautifully as it did. I also want to thank Kelley Kimm of the Purdue University Press for her outstanding editorial work and patience. My daughter, Jennifer Hansen Gray, once again helped her father in various ways, including not just transcribing many of the letters but helping me to choose the best letters to publish. Rick Armstrong, Neil’s oldest son, also helped me a number of times, providing additional information and answering questions prompted by the letters.

DEAR NEIL ARMSTRONG

Finally, I want to thank all of the people who wrote letters to Neil from 1969 until his death in 2012, and in particular the significant number of folks I was able to hunt down and talk to about their Dear Neil letters.

James R. Hansen
Auburn, Alabama
July 2019