

SEP 22 1976

Dr. Carl Sagan
Laboratory for Planetary Studies
Cornell University
Space Sciences Building
Ithaca, NY 14853

Dear Carl:

You may recall that when you gave the Goddard lecture you spoke about the cherry tree in which Goddard was sitting when he had his vision concerning space ships and exploration of the universe. Taking this stimulus, we have progressed to the point of developing a new NASA award which we propose calling the "Goddard Imagineering Award." Enclosed is the proposal for the award which I thought you might enjoy reviewing and commenting upon. Since we propose announcing this new award at the NASA Awards Ceremony on October 28, I would appreciate receiving your comments as soon as possible.

It was a pleasure seeing you at both the Viking landing and Shuttle rollout ceremonies.

Sincerely,

Herbert J. Rowe
Associate Administrator
for External Affairs
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Associate Administrator
for External Affairs

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Enclosure

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PROPOSAL FOR NEW NASA AWARD

BACKGROUND

Despite the fact that NASA is an agency with a reputation for imagination/innovation, we do not have a single award devoted to this aspect of our work. Such an award would be appropriate because it would focus attention on NASA's "people," not machines. It is also appropriate because the history of aerospace progress is so very much a history of strong willed individuals pursuing innovative concepts.

The background and achievements of one such individual, Dr. Robert H. Goddard, would seem to provide a natural focal point for establishment of this sort of award. His personal history provides us with a unique point of reference for such an award...the very place and time he made the discovery/decision to pursue space research as a lifetime vocation.

In the definitive Goddard biography, "This High Man", by Milton Lehman, this significant day in the life of Dr. Goddard is described thusly:

Like other autumn days on Maple Hill, the afternoon of October 19 was quiet. After his long rest-time in bed, Robert was glad to be out of doors. He stood for a few moments on the back porch. In the yard, enclosed by chicken wire, near the tool shed, was "Uncle" George Boswell's collection of cocker spaniels, two dozen of them yawping and sprawling over one another, some nuzzling up to their mothers who lay sunning themselves beside the fence.

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He went past the spaniels to the shed where the sight of "Uncle" George's immaculately arranged tools was "always a feast to my eyes." There he kept his own tools, oiled, sharpened, each in its proper place. He picked up his bench saw, his hatchet and a small ladder he'd nailed together, and headed down to the fruit orchard to do some pruning. He stopped before a gnarled cherry tree at the edge of a narrow brook.

He propped his ladder against the cherry tree and climbed into its foliage. He hooked his saw and hatchet on a broken branch, then paused, enjoying the smell of meadow and woods below, hearing the sound of brook and birds. Lying in the tree, as if in a womb of branches and leaves, he could lose all sense of time and space and immediacy.

While he was suspended there, a fantasy took shape in the mirrors of his mind, an image sharp enough to shut out the surrounding scene. A mechanical device materialized from nowhere, functioning perfectly. Faster and faster it whirled until it began to lift, twirling and spinning above Worcester and sickness and spaniels and fruit trees, upwards into space.

The boy was transfixed. When he collected himself, he began to prune one of the dead branches. But after a few cuts with his saw, he climbed down. He walked back to the tool shed and the house.

Goddard marked the day, October 19, in his diary every year thereafter, referring to it as "Anniversary Day." That evening, however, he wrote simply: "...trimmed large cherry tree..." He amplified the experience in his autobiographical notes:

A special panel of five judges should be established for this award. Each should be a national figure in his own right and have demonstrated in his career high levels of imagination/innovation/achievement. The award will be from the corporate community.

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"On this day I climbed a tall cherry tree at the back of the barn...and as I looked toward the fields at the east, I imagined how wonderful it would be to make some device which had even the possibility of ascending to Mars, and how it would look on a small scale, if sent up from the meadow at my feet. I have several photographs of the tree, taken since, with the little ladder I made to climb it, leaning against it.

"It seemed to me then that a weight whirling around a horizontal shaft, moving more rapidly above than below, could furnish lift by virtue of the greater centrifugal force at the top of the path.

"I was a different boy when I descended the tree from when I ascended," he wrote. "Existence at last seemed very purposive."

In this one event we have the historically interesting circumstantial elements needed to initiate a new award and appropriate symbology for maximum public impact.

In view of the above it is recommended that NASA establish a new annual honor award tailored to recognize the past years most imaginative/innovative achievement in furthering the end objectives of the nation's aerospace effort. Some specifics.

a. It would be agency-wide in scope and embrace all aerospace employees, both civil service and contractors.

b. All elements of our activities would be encompassed, i.e., science, management and engineering.

c. A special panel of five judges should be established for this award. Each should be a national figure in his own right and have demonstrated in his career high levels of imagination/innovation achievements. They need not be from the aerospace community.

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d. In addition to the usual certificate, the award should provide for a cash benefit of \$1,776 (in recognition of its establishment during the nation's Bicentennial).

e. The new award would be designated the "GODDARD IMAGINEERING AWARD" and be bestowed during the annual NASA Awards Ceremony in October.

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