

Our Missouri Podcast

Title: Summer Series, Part 4: One Year Later

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KEVIN WALSH: Welcome to *Our Missouri*, a podcast about the people, places, culture, and history of the 114 counties and independent city of Saint Louis that comprise the great state of Missouri. Each episode focuses on a topic related to the state ranging from publications about Missouri's history to current projects undertaken by organizations to preserve and promote local institutions. The *Our Missouri Podcast* is recorded at the Center for Missouri Studies in Columbia, and is generously provided to you by the State Historical Society of Missouri. And now, here's your host, Sean Rost.

SEAN ROST: Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening, or at whatever hour you are tuning in to listen to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. My name is Sean Rost and I will be your guide as we explore the memories, moments, and misfortunes from our Missouri. Fifty years ago this summer—1969 to be exact—the space race pitting the United States against the Soviet Union was reaching the proverbial finish line. The only question that remained was: Who would land on the Moon first? Over the next four episodes, we will explore the history behind the contributions made by Americans—and more specifically, Missourians—to not only explore the far reaches of space, but also to land a person on the Moon. So, let's prepare for launch.

[Mission Control Opening Sequence]

SEAN ROST: On July 24th, 1969, *Columbia*—the vessel that shepherded Michael Collins, Buzz Aldrin, and Neil Armstrong through space—splashed down in the Pacific Ocean. They had done it. Neil Armstrong's first footprint on the moon's surface had been "one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." The decade long push to fulfill John F. Kennedy's vision to land a human on the moon by the end of the 1960s was a success—and with roughly five months to spare. Their landing on the moon's Sea of Tranquility led many people to speculate that the goodwill of the Apollo missions would usher in an era of peace and prosperity on Earth.

Yet, in the midst of ticker-tape parades, visits with world leaders, and countless interviews about the now famous mission, NASA officials worried that these historic steps would quickly be forgotten once the target was achieved. In many ways, they were right. At the same time that all three astronauts received their welcome home parades, Hollywood grappled with the fallout over the Sharon Tate/LaBianca murders, Hurricane Camille made landfall along the Gulf Coast, and thousands of people headed to Bethel, New York, for the Woodstock Music Festival. By January, the '60s were over and apprehension followed about just what the 1970s would bring. President Richard Nixon's decision to escalate the Vietnam War through a series of bombing campaigns in Cambodia brought significant backlash from opponents of the war. In May 1970, Kent State University in Ohio and Jackson State University in Mississippi were home

to bloodshed as police, national guardsmen, and students clashed over the direction of the war. The astronauts had come home, but so had the war.

In an effort to hold on to the fast changing news cycle, and promote the continued relevance of space exploration, NASA launched an ambitious plan to make artifacts from Apollo 11 tour the country. This fifty state adventure would showcase a moon rock and the astronauts' spacesuits as well as the *Columbia* command module.¹ This undertaking was novel, but not new, as both John Glenn's Mercury *Friendship 7* and Gordon Cooper's Mercury *Faith 7* had gone on traveling exhibits between 1962 and 1964.² *Faith 7* went on display in Jefferson City in mid-October 1963, roughly five months after the conclusion of Cooper's orbit of the Earth.³ Nevertheless, this Apollo 11 tour was part of a larger global plan to remind people just how significant space flight was—and still could be. The space race was over, but NASA had no plans to close up shop and let the government cut its funding. So, from the moment that Collins, Aldrin, and Armstrong emerged from their post-mission quarantine, NASA sent them around the world.⁴

At the same time that Collins, Aldrin, and Armstrong greeted eager admirers, NASA officials made plans for an interactive exhibit to showcase key pieces of the Apollo 11 mission—and to drum up continued support for spaceflight. What would become the year-long, fifty state tour of Apollo 11 memorabilia arrived in Sacramento, California for the first public showing in April 1970. Governor—later president—Ronald Reagan opened the festivities before the items were loaded up and sent to Carson City, Nevada. From Nevada, the exhibit on wheels toured the states of the Pacific Northwest, Rocky Mountains, and Missouri River Valley. By July 4th, it had left Pierre, South Dakota and was on its way to Nebraska, Kansas, and eventually Missouri. In all, the Apollo 11 Spacecraft and Lunar Rock Mobile Exhibit—its official name—would host well over a million people during 1970 and 1971. In California, Massachusetts, Texas, and Alabama, crowds neared 100,000 people during the exhibit's visit. Hawaii, ironically one of the nation's smallest states, drew an estimated 135,000 people.⁵

By the time the trucks and trailers containing the Apollo 11 artifacts pulled into Jefferson City on Thursday, July 16th—stop number fourteen on the itinerary—the process of loading and unloading was not new. Setting up on the north side of the capitol grounds facing the Missouri River, the contents were unloaded in preparation for the eager crowds. The large trailer opened by way of a stairwell so groups could access the materials inside and exit on the other end. A

¹ David Meerman Scott and Richard Jurek, *Marketing the Moon: The Selling of the Apollo Lunar Program* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014), 91-109; Allan Needell, "The Last Time the Command Module *Columbia* Toured," Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, February 25, 2017, <https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/last-time-command-module-columbia-toured>.

² Scott and Jurek, *Marketing the Moon*, 101.

³ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 6 October 1963.

⁴ Scott and Jurek, *Marketing the Moon*, 91-97.

⁵ Scott and Jurek, *Marketing the Moon*, 101-106; Needell, "The Last Time the Command Module *Columbia* Toured."

temporary stage was also constructed on the capitol grounds for the speeches scheduled for Friday, July 17th—the grand opening—and Monday, July 20th—the day when Collins, Aldrin, and Armstrong were supposed to make their appearance.⁶

The Apollo 11 astronauts were not originally supposed to be in Jefferson City, though. For the one year anniversary of the moonwalk, all three men had been asked to appear before dignitaries at the United Nations in New York City. Yet, sensing that NASA might be eager for the photo-op, Governor Warren Hearnes formally invited the astronauts to Jefferson City to see the capsule and to be honored by state officials. News of the invitation and acceptance sent a buzz through the state, and Jefferson City residents estimated that a large crowd would cycle through the four day viewing period, particularly on Monday, July 20th. In many ways, they were right in this estimate. The local Thomas Jefferson Library reported that there had been a rush on books related to space flight, outer space, and rocketry as the event drew near. Later newspaper estimates placed the weekend crowd at roughly 36,000.⁷

The first day of the festivities set the mark for how significant the long weekend would be. Bright and early on Friday morning, Governor Hearnes—joined by State Treasurer William E. Robinson and State Auditor Haskell Holman—cut the ceremonial ribbon and opened the Apollo exhibit to the crowd. Hearnes told those assembled, "This is a rare opportunity for the people of our state to personally examine a variety of objects from one of the greatest events of world history." After the local dignitaries passed through the exhibit space, groups soon ascended the stairwell to view the collection of spacesuits, the moon rock fragment, and the *Columbia* capsule.⁸ The *Jefferson City Post-Tribune* reported that, "Hundreds of school children peered wide-eyed at the capsule."⁹ It was an auspicious opening to the weekend-long festivities, but as people filtered through the exhibit on Saturday and Sunday, everyone knew that Monday was to be a grand finale. Before we return to our story, here's Danielle Griego to talk about National History Day in Missouri and the My Missouri 2021 Photograph Project.

DANIELLE GRIEGO: Hi, I'm Danielle Griego, the Education Coordinator for the State Historical Society of Missouri. I'd like to talk to you briefly about National History Day in Missouri. National History Day in Missouri is a unique opportunity for middle and high school age students to explore the past in a creative, hands-on way by producing a documentary, exhibit, paper, performance, or website on a topic of their choosing. In June, Missouri students traveled to Washington D.C. for the National Contest and brought home 3 bronze medals and 2 Outstanding Entry Awards. In 2020, the theme will be "Breaking Barriers in History," and we look forward to the amazing projects Missouri students will produce. To learn more about

⁶ *Jefferson City Daily Capitol News*, 16 July 1970, 18 July 1970; *Jefferson City Post-Tribune*, 16 July 1970, 17 July 1970.

⁷ *Jefferson City Daily Capitol News*, 16 July 1970, 17 July 1970, 18 July 1970, 21 July 1970; *Jefferson City Post-Tribune*, 16 July 1970, 17 July 1970, 20 July 1970.

⁸ *Jefferson City Daily Capitol News*, 18 July 1970; *Jefferson City Post-Tribune*, 17 July 1970.

⁹ *Jefferson City Post-Tribune*, 17 July 1970.

National History Day in Missouri, including how to start a program at your own school, please visit shsmo.org/nhdmo.

The Missouri Bicentennial provides an occasion for reflecting upon and increasing understanding of various aspects of the State's cultural and geographic landscape. Missouri 2021 invites professional and amateur photographers to capture and share unique and meaningful aspects of place in Missouri. Through the My Missouri 2021 Photograph Project, two hundred photographs will be selected to be part of the permanent Missouri Bicentennial collection at the State Historical Society of Missouri. Together these images will create a snapshot of the state's physical and cultural landscape during its Bicentennial that will be available to researchers, teachers, and students, and the public for generations to come. To learn more about the My Missouri 2021 Photograph Project, please visit missouri2021.org/my-missouri.

SEAN ROST: On the morning of July 20th—just as they had been a year earlier—the Apollo 11 astronauts were in flight. Whereas before they had been orbiting the Moon, now the airplane they rode in made its final descent into Elkhurst Airport—known today as Columbia Regional Airport—where an estimated crowd of 2,000 awaited them. From Elkhurst, the astronauts made the roughly twenty mile journey into Jefferson City. Their stay in the capitol city would be brief, however, as NASA had plans to quickly get them back in the air and on to the United Nations. Nevertheless, Governor Hearnes hoped to make the most of what the newspaper called "brief but rousing ceremonies." But, initially, technology failed. Just as Hearnes and the astronauts prepared to greet the crowd, the microphones on-site cut out. As officials quickly scrambled to fix the problem, eager school children swarmed the astronauts near the stage seeking autographs. Local police officers worked to shoo the children away, lest an autograph session overtake the scheduled festivities. Perhaps aware of NASA's efforts to drum up support for new funding for the space program, Hearnes later commented that he would support continued funding as long as some of it went towards better public address systems.¹⁰

With the microphones back on and in working order, Hearnes introduced each astronaut as the "living symbols of freedom and greatness of the United States of America." He then presented them with the Mule Skinner Award. The Missouri Tourism Commission, as a way to honor VIP's visiting the state for various functions, had recently created the Mule Skinner Award. State officials originally planned to give the Award to President Richard Nixon and Vice President Spiro Agnew upon their visits to Missouri, but the Apollo 11 astronauts presented a perfect opportunity to present the inaugural award. Hearnes told the crowd that, "The Missouri mule skinner or mule team driver helped push back the wilderness in an earlier age to forge a new nation by delivering the freight needed to settle the West. The Apollo 11 crew delivered an even better payload, they planted America's flag on the moon."¹¹

Given their time to speak, each astronaut touched on specific themes of space exploration. Michael Collins looked to the future and noted that, "Man does in fact have the capability to explore the solar system—and that's something we definitely should do." Buzz

¹⁰ *Jefferson City Daily Capitol News*, 21 July 1970; *Jefferson City Post-Tribune*, 20 July 1970.

¹¹ *Jefferson City Daily Capitol News*, 21 July 1970; *Jefferson City Post-Tribune*, 20 July 1970.

Aldrin reflected on the historic nature of the Apollo 11 mission and said that it, "made the dream of centuries a reality." Neil Armstrong—noting the Mule Skinner Award he'd been given—referenced the efforts of the NASA team to get a human to the moon. "We had a couple of mules on our team," Armstrong said, "They were hardworking, and occasionally stubborn, but they always got the job done." The astronauts also made sure to add a little boosterism to their speeches to excite the crowd. Collins spoke of Charles Lindbergh's *Spirit of St. Louis* and all of the hard work of employees at St. Louis-based McDonnell Aircraft in building the Mercury and Gemini capsules, before concluding, "I think I should probably talk to the Apollo 14 crew about naming it Jefferson City." His reference to naming the upcoming capsule after the capitol city drew loud cheers.¹²

After an hour in the shadow capitol building's dome, the festivities concluded. Collins, Aldrin, and Armstrong boarded their plane and headed on to the United Nations. While in New York, they presented a moon rock to U Thant, Secretary-General of the U.N. At the same time, the Apollo 11 caravan packed up and rolled out of Jefferson City on its way to Des Moines, Iowa.¹³ From there, it traveled through the Upper Midwest, the Ohio River Valley, New England, and the East Coast, before moving westward through the Southland and the Southwest. After stops in Hawaii and Alaska, the Apollo 11 items were moved to new homes.¹⁴ Today, visitors can see the *Columbia* capsule at the Smithsonian Institute's National Air and Space Museum in Washington D.C.¹⁵

So, in looking back over what authors' David Meerman Scott and Richard Jurek called "The Apollo Roadshow," how successful were NASA's attempts to keep Americans' attention glued to the space program? Well, the answer is complicated. By most accounts, interest in the remaining Apollo missions declined steeply in the early 1970s, both in the American living room as well as in the halls of Congress. Skylab and the space shuttle program were greenlighted, but a trip to the moon was no longer desirable.¹⁶ Yet, with classrooms around the country populated with images from shuttle missions and the Hubble Telescope, interest and admiration in space flight remains strong. School children, it seems, still want to be astronauts. Back in central Missouri, residents still speak of not only the day that Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin stepped foot on the moon—July 20, 1969—but also of the day that Armstrong, Aldrin, and Michael Collins stepped foot in Jefferson City—July 20, 1970—exactly one year later.

SEAN ROST: Thanks for listening to this week's episode. As always, I am your host, Sean Rost. The show's producer is Brian Austin. The opening and concluding credits are narrated by Kevin Walsh. We hope that you enjoyed this Summer Series as much as we enjoyed bringing

¹² *Jefferson City Daily Capitol News*, 21 July 1970; *Jefferson City Post-Tribune*, 20 July 1970.

¹³ *Jefferson City Daily Capitol News*, 21 July 1970; *Jefferson City Post-Tribune*, 20 July 1970; Scott and Jurek, *Marketing the Moon*, 101-106.

¹⁴ Scott and Jurek, *Marketing the Moon*, 101-106; Needell, "The Last Time the Command Module *Columbia* Toured."

¹⁵ Needell, "The Last Time the Command Module *Columbia* Toured."

¹⁶ Scott and Jurek, *Marketing the Moon*, 101-125.

it to you. As has been mentioned throughout the series, there are a few ways that the State Historical Society of Missouri's Oral History Program is seeking to preserve the memories of space exploration and the race to the moon. If you are a former employee of McDonnell, McDonnell Douglas, or Boeing, and would be interested in recording an oral history interview about your life and career, please let us know. We would also be interested in recording oral history interviews with former employees of Rocketdyne in Neosho. Finally, in an effort to document the history of the moon landing, we will be collecting stories from anyone interested in speaking about their memories of this historic event. These "Memories of the Moon Landing" conversations will be preserved in the Missouri Innovation & Exploration Oral History Project (C4352). Oral history interview inquiries can be emailed to "ourmissouri@shsmo.org." Thank you again for listening. Stay tuned for the start of Season 2 of the Our Missouri Podcast in September.

KEVIN WALSH: Thank you for listening to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. If you would like to learn more about the podcast, including past and future episodes, information about guests, and upcoming events, please visit our website at shsmo.org/our-missouri.