



Wilbur & Orville Wright: A Reissue of A Chronology Commemorating the Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of Orville Wright, August 19, 1871

Arthur George Renstrom, National Aeronautics and Space Administration

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During the year 2003, hundreds of events will mark the one-hundredth anniversary of the Wright brothers' historic first flights at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. The centennial year will witness exhibitions, lectures, television documentaries, films, air shows, flight recreations of Wright aircraft, the issuing of postage stamps and medals, the publication of dozens of new books and articles, and numerous other commemorative activities. One of these events, although not likely to make the evening news, is among the most important of all in terms of a lasting contribution to the observance of this ultimate aviation milestone: the reprinting of Arthur G. Renstrom's *Wilbur & Orville Wright: A Chronology Commemorating the Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of Orville Wright, August 19, 1871*. Since its appearance in 1975, *Wilbur & Orville Wright: A Chronology* has become indispensable to students and authors concerned with the life and work of the famous brothers. No doubt every book on the subject published in the last quarter century, including three of my own, was written with this treasure close at hand. This volume is far more than a simple compilation of dates and facts. Renstrom was a master reference librarian and bibliographer with a passion for aviation and the Wright brothers. He brought his considerable research skills to bear on the topic, and the result is a richly detailed, ever-informative, often entertaining walk through the lives and achievements of these two extraordinary individuals. Renstrom was not content to offer a date with a one-line tidbit. His entries are brimming with information. This is a highly readable reference work that, believe or not, can be enjoyably read from cover to cover. The project was clearly a labor of love by a talented professional. During most of the last twenty years, I have been privileged to be the curator of the 1903 Wright Flyer at the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum. The position brings a steady stream of inquiries about the Wright airplane and the endlessly fascinating brothers who created it. I do not know how I would have done this job without Renstrom's superb volume on my bookshelf. It is the first place I go to check anything on the Wright brothers, and I typically find what I am looking for in its pages. Arthur Renstrom also published two other classic reference works on the Wright brothers: *Wilbur & Orville Wright: A Bibliography Commemorating the Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of Wilbur Wright, April 16, 1867*, in 1968 (an updated revision was published by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in 2002) and *Wilbur & Orville Wright, Pictorial Materials: A Documentary Guide* in 1982, completing a series of research tools for which there are few peers on any subject. He was also part of the team that produced the landmark two-volume compilation of the Wrights' letters, notebooks, and diaries in 1953, *The Papers of Wilbur and Orville Wright*, edited by Marvin W. McFarland. Renstrom's contribution to the documentation and preservation of the Wright story is a lasting legacy that will serve researchers, students, and general enthusiasts for generations to come. In this busy, high-profile anniversary year, the reprinting of a nearly thirty-year-old reference book may seem a mundane and quiet contribution to the celebration surrounding the Wright brothers' world-changing achievement, but it is perhaps one of the most important. The U.S. Centennial of Flight Commission and NASA are to be commended for their foresight.



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