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Small Steps, Giant Leaps: Apollo 11 at Fifty exhibition at Houghton Library brings moon landing to life

Free exhibition at Houghton Library tells the story of how we got to the moon

Key Points:

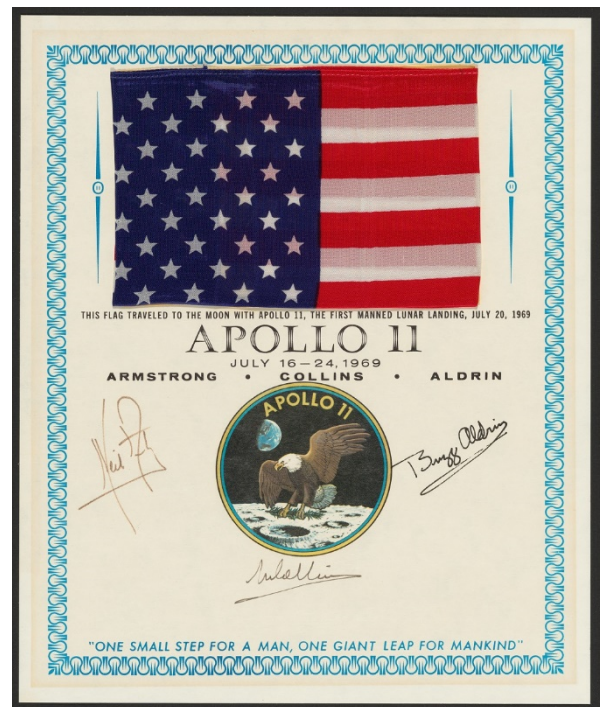
- Includes rarely-seen artifacts from the Apollo 11 mission
- Free and open to the public. Closes August 3, 2019

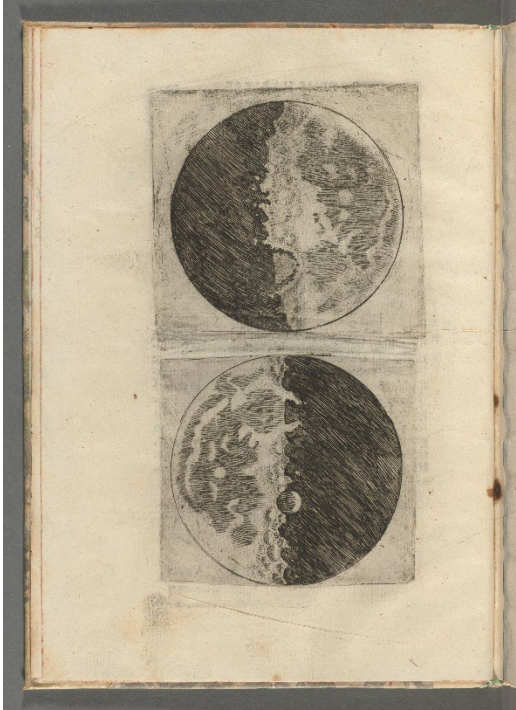
CAMBRIDGE, MA— As he became the first person to set foot on the moon, Neil Armstrong announced, “That’s one small step for [a] man, one giant leap for mankind.” [*Small Steps, Giant Leaps: Apollo 11 at Fifty \(April 29–August 3, 2019\)*](#) celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of that remarkable achievement as the last step in a long series of breakthroughs that stretches back through the centuries to the beginnings of the modern scientific understanding of our place in the universe.

On display are landmarks in the history of science from the collections of Harvard University’s rare books repository Houghton Library—such as first editions of Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton—together with rarely exhibited highlights from a private spaceflight collection, including artifacts used during the

Apollo 11 mission and on the moon itself by astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin. Together, these objects illuminate the path of research and discovery that made Apollo 11 possible.

“*Small Steps, Giant Leaps* presents the story of the Apollo 11 mission through an historical lens unique to Houghton Library,” says Thomas Hyry, Florence Fearington Librarian of Houghton Library. “The spectacular items on display in this exhibition document not only the feat itself, but the centuries of scientific discovery necessary to send a human to the moon.”





The exhibition was co-curated by John Overholt, Curator of the Donald and Mary Hyde Collection of Dr. Samuel Johnson and Early Books and Manuscripts at Houghton, and a Harvard alumnus who loaned 37 items from his private spaceflight collection that are either unique or not already held by the library.

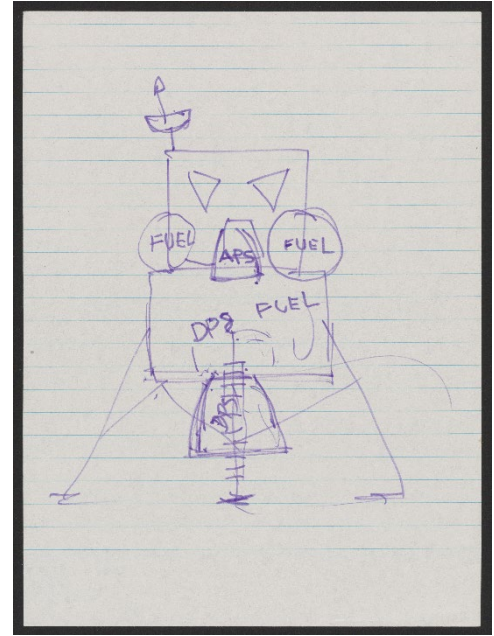
“The story of Apollo 11 is fascinating,” explains the collector, who wishes to remain anonymous, “because it involves so many interconnected developments in the history of math and science, engineering and technology, and travel and exploration, driven by both peaceful inquiry and military necessity.”

The exhibition highlights these connections using rare and important objects dating from the fifteenth to twentieth centuries, including landmarks of early modern science to artifacts used by the Apollo 11 astronauts during their trip to the moon, to animate the stories that made Armstrong’s “small step” possible.

Some highlights from the exhibition include:

1. Galileo’s earliest observations of the moon through a telescope, as published in his groundbreaking work *Sidereus Nuncius* (Starry Messenger) in 1610.
2. Original photograph of the Wright Brother’s first glider capable of carrying a human, photographed in an unmanned flight. The words “Lemme down,” inscribed in pencil in the lower margin, recall the famous words shouted by Wilbur to Orville during one of his first flights.

3. Star chart used by Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin to calibrate *Eagle's* guidance system soon after landing on the surface of the moon. The chart is notable for the presence of planet Earth among the stars, as well as for the moon dust coating the back of the Velcro patch.
4. Flight plan inscribed by Neil Armstrong with the famous words "That's one small step for [a] man, one giant leap for mankind", while in protective quarantine with his fellow astronauts and several other NASA employees.



To celebrate the occasion and honor the private collector's generosity, the exhibition is accompanied by a printed commemorative catalog which focuses on the loaned items only and also available for free online.

"History really comes to life for me when you can see for yourself the authentic artifacts that played a role in important events," says John Overholt. "I hope our exhibition will excite, inform and inspire anyone who remembers the Apollo 11 landing or wants to learn more about it."

Images available on request:

1. *American flag carried to the moon by Neil Armstrong in his Personal Preference Kit and mounted on a commemorative certificate signed by all three Apollo 11 astronauts. Private collection.*
2. *Galileo's earliest observations of the moon through a telescope, as published in his groundbreaking work Sidereus Nuncius (Starry Messenger) in 1610. Houghton Library, Harvard University. *IC6.G1333.610s. Gift of Robert Wheeler Wilson, 1927.*
3. *Armstrong's sketch of the Lunar Module made during a visit to his home in Wapakoneta, Ohio, to explain the upcoming Apollo 11 mission to his father, Stephen. Private collection.*

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