

# University of Houston Clear Lake

## Archives and Special Collections

**HSF-19**

**Joseph G. Thibodaux Jr. Papers**

[Human Space Flight Collection]

**Collection Number:** HSF-19

**Title:** Joseph G. Thibodaux Jr. Papers (**Collection with Restricted Materials**)

**Dates:** 1915-2008

**Creator:** Joseph G. Thibodaux Jr.

### **Abstract**

The Joseph G. Thibodaux Papers is composed of correspondence, photographs, memoranda, telegrams, programs, certificates, meeting minutes, artwork, scrapbooks, family genealogical and biographical data records, newspaper articles, journal articles, and miscellaneous materials, documenting the personal and professional career of Joseph Guy Thibodaux Jr. Thibodaux first began working for National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics in 1946. He would go to work at NASA's Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston, Texas, in 1964, serving as the Chief of the Propulsion and Power Division before retiring from NASA in 1980. The collection materials date from 1915 to 2008, including family records and information for the Thibodaux family.

**Extent:** Approximately 4.00 linear feet

**Language:** English

### **Repository**

University of Houston-Clear Lake Archives and Special Collections, Alfred R. Neumann Library, 2700 Bay Area Blvd., Houston, TX 77058-1002

### **Restrictions on Access**

Box 2, Folder 5, entitled "Letters and Emails" is restricted from public access. Researchers interested in accessing these materials should consult with the UHCL Archives and Special Collections Associate Director for a review of the legal and/or ethical concerns that may make these materials inaccessible.

## **Restrictions on Use**

The collection contains journal and newspaper articles for which the University of Houston-Clear Lake Archives and Special Collections does not own the copyright. The copyright remains with the author and/or publisher under Title 17 of the U.S. Copyright Law. Researchers are responsible for obtaining permission from the copyright holder(s) to use materials beyond the “fair use” clause of the U.S. Copyright Law.

## **Preferred Citation**

[Item name or title], [Box Numbers], [Folder Numbers], Joseph G. Thibodaux Jr. Papers, HSF-19, University of Houston-Clear Lake Archives and Special Collections, Alfred R. Neumann Library, 2700 Bay Area Blvd., Houston, TX 77058-1002

## **Acquisition**

The collection was donated to the University of Houston-Clear Lake Archives and Special Collections by Joseph G. Thibodaux Jr. in May 2011.

## **Related Material:**

Joseph G. “Guy” Thibodaux, Jr. Oral History Interview, conducted on October 20, 1999, Johnson Space Center History Office. Transcript online at [https://historycollection.jsc.nasa.gov/JSCHistoryPortal/history/oral\\_histories/ThibodauxJG/ThibodauxJG\\_10-20-99.htm](https://historycollection.jsc.nasa.gov/JSCHistoryPortal/history/oral_histories/ThibodauxJG/ThibodauxJG_10-20-99.htm).

## **Processing Information**

The original collection was numbered according to a pre-2022 numbering system, which was the accession number for the collection. This was composed of the year in which the collection was accessioned into the UHCL Archives’ holdings and the number of the collection in the order it was accessioned. For example, the collection number “2016-0006” should be interpreted as “Year 2016, 6th collection accessioned that year.” Folders in the collection were numbered using a number for the box number, followed by a short dash, followed by the folder number, placed on the far-right side of the folder tab. For example, Box 1, Folder 1, would be written as 1-1.

**Processed By:** Erin Henry, 2016; updated by Robert Nañes and Matthew M. Peek, April-May 2023.

## **Arrangement**

The collection is arranged chronologically in boxes and folders based on formats of the materials. The collection is organized into 12 series: Series I: Biographical Materials; Series II: Correspondence; Series III: Photographs; Series IV: Awards; Series V: Government Documents;

Series VI: Meeting Minutes; Series VII: Transcripts; Series VIII: Personal Documents; Series IX: Retirement; Series X: Oral Histories; Series XI: Artwork; and Series XII: Periodicals.

### **Biographical Note**

Joseph G. Thibodaux Jr. (who went by “Guy”) was born on November 27, 1921, in Verett Parish, Louisiana, to Joseph Guy and Leone Falterman Thibodaux. Joseph Thibodaux attended grade school in New Orleans, Louisiana, and received a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering from Louisiana State University in 1942. During his time at LSU which began in 1938, he was a cadet in the U.S. Army ROTC at the start of World War II. Upon graduation, Thibodaux served as an Officer in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He was stationed in the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater in Burma during World War II, where he played an instrumental role in the construction of the Ledo and Burma Roads.

Following his return home from the war, Thibodaux began his professional career in 1946 as an Aeronautical Research Scientist in the Pilotless Aircraft Research Division for the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics in Newport News, Virginia. In 1964, Thibodaux and his family moved to Houston, Texas, where he assumed the Chief of the Propulsion and Power Division role at the newly-constructed NASA Manned Spacecraft Center (later Johnson Space Center) until his retirement in 1980. Thibodaux holds five patents on solid rockets and solid rocket manufacturing techniques. In addition, he specialized in the fields of vehicle propulsion, liquid rockets, thermal protection, high-temperature materials, meteoroid and impact phenomena, thermal arc technology, flight test technology, and pyrotechnics during his career.

Thibodaux’s early work consisted of modifying, redesigning, and adapting military rockets to meet the performance requirements of the various aerodynamic research programs using free-flying rocket-propelled models. Later, he became an internationally recognized expert in all propulsion used in manned and unmanned spacecraft. In particular, Thibodaux distinguished himself as an authority on the design, development, and application of solid and liquid propellant rockets to launching and boosting of sounding rockets, research vehicles, and spacecrafts. His engineering leadership and technical knowledge contributed significantly to the success of the Mercury, Gemini, Apollo, Skylab, and Space Shuttle programs.

During his career, Thibodaux worked directly with every NASA Center (Langley, Kennedy, Marshall, Dryden, Wallops Station, National Space Technology Laboratory), aerospace contractor (Rockwell, Lockheed, Martin, McDonnell-Douglas, Grumman, Beech, Air Research), and rocket manufacturer for the United States government. He received the Presidential Medal of Freedom and was inducted into the LSU Engineering Hall of Distinction in 2005. Joseph Thibodaux died on April 26, 2016, in Houston, Texas.

[Historical information used to create this biography comes from the following sources:  
Legacy.com. "Joseph Thibodaux Obituary." Accessed April 5, 2023.  
[https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/bay\\_area/name/joseph-Thibodaux-](https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/bay_area/name/joseph-Thibodaux-)

obituary?id=17919149.; Thibodaux, Joseph. "A Guide to Writing a Thesis in History and Literature." Louisiana State University. Accessed April 5, 2023. [https://www.lsu.edu/eng/docs/HOD/joseph\\_Thibodaux.pdf.](https://www.lsu.edu/eng/docs/HOD/joseph_Thibodaux.pdf)]

## **Scope and Content**

The collection is composed of correspondence, photographs, memoranda, telegrams, programs, certificates, meeting minutes, artwork, scrapbooks, family genealogical and biographical data records, newspaper articles, journal articles, and miscellaneous materials, documenting the personal and professional career of Joseph Guy Thibodaux Jr. Thibodaux first began working for National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (the precursor to NASA) in 1946 as an aeronautical research scientists, eventually going to work at NASA's Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston, Texas, in 1964. Thibodaux served as the Chief of the Propulsion and Power Division, retiring from NASA in 1980. The collection materials date from 1915 to 2008, including family records and information for the Thibodaux family. There are very few personal work materials from his time working at NASA, though what does exist was tied to his work as an expert on all propulsion systems used in manned and unmanned spacecraft

## **Collection Inventory**

### **Series I: Biographical Materials**

<b>Box/Folder</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>	<b>Dates</b>
1/1	Family Records	1922-1972
1/2	Biographical Data Sheets	1971-2004

### **Series II: Correspondence**

<b>Box/Folder</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>	<b>Dates</b>
1/3	Memoranda	1957-1987 (general coverage range)
1/4	Memoranda	1957-1987 (general coverage range)
1/5	Memoranda	1957-1987 (general coverage range)
1/6	Telegrams	1965-1980

1/7	Personal Letters	1938-1973 (general coverage range)
1/8	Personal Letters	1938-1973 (general coverage range)
1/9	Personal Letters	1938-1973 (general coverage range)
2/1	Personal Letters	1974-2010 (general coverage range)
2/2	Personal Letters	1974-2010 (general coverage range)
2/3	Personal Letters	1974-2010 (general coverage range)
2/4	Invitations and Programs	1942-2007
2/5	Letters and Emails	<b>(THIS ITEM IS RESTRICTED FROM ACCESS)</b>

### **Series III: Photographs**

<b>Box/Folder</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>	<b>Dates</b>
2/6	NASA Photographs	Varous dates
2/7	NASA Photographs	Varous dates
2/8	Award Ceremonies	1969-1975
2/9	Family Photographs	1972-2005

### **Series IV: Awards**

<b>Box/Folder</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>	<b>Dates</b>
2/10	Certificates	1954-2001
2/11	Nominations	1974-2007

## Series V: Government Documents

<b>Box/Folder</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>	<b>Dates</b>
3/1	“Law Establishing the NACA”	March 3, 1915
3/2	“Large Solid Propellant Rockets for the Initial Booster Stage of a Circumlunar and a Lunar Landing Vehicle” by NASA Space Task Group and Langley Research Center	1961
3/3	U.S. Patents, Joseph G. Thibodaux	1963-1965
3/4	“Project Apollo – A Study in Applications of Chemical Engineering Unit Processes and Technology” by Joseph G. Thibodaux, Jr.	October 13, 1967
3/5	“Some Observations on the development of the Rocket Industry in the United States: Solids and Liquids, 1946 – 1986” (4 copies) by J.G. Thibodaux	circa 1986
3/6	“MPS LCC Review” by Zack Kirkland, Charles Wood, [Joseph] Guy Thibodaux, Owen Morris, John Watson	October 15, 1987
3/7	Launch Vehicle History & Technical Data	2005-2006
3/8	“Experience with Spherical Solid Propellant Rockets” by Joseph G. Thibodaux, Jr.	Undated
3/9	“The Use of Solid-Propellant Vehicle Stages for Manned Spacecraft” by NASA Space Task Group (Maxime Faget, Alan Kehlet, and Joseph Thibodaux)	Undated
3/10	“Ascent/Descent Propulsion Systems”	Undated
3/11	“PRA [Probabilistic Risk Assessment] Scope”	Undated
3/12	NASA Apollo 11 – First Manned Lunar Landing Mission Information Display & Abbreviations by TRW Systems	Undated
3/13	Excerpts from “SP-4308 Spaceflight Revolution”	Undated

by James R. Hansen

3/14 Consulting Agreements (THIS ITEM IS CLOSED) 1987-1993

**Series VI: Meeting Minutes**

<b>Box/Folder</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>	<b>Dates</b>
3/15	Hearing before the Select Committee on Astronautics and Space Exploration. "Authorizing Construction for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration"	August 1, 1958
3/16	Shuttle Block II/Technology Meeting	February 9, 1987

**Series VII: Transcripts**

<b>Box/Folder</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>	<b>Dates</b>
3/17	Apollo 12 Air-to-Ground Voice Transcripts	Undated

**Series VIII: Personal Documents**

<b>Box/Folder</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>	<b>Dates</b>
3/18	Collected Poetry	Undated
3/19	Recreational Materials	Undated

**Series IX: Retirement**

<b>Box/Folder</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>	<b>Dates</b>
3/20	Retirement Scrapbook Documents	1980
3/Loose	Retirement Scrapbook	1980

**Series X: Oral Histories**

<b>Box/Folder</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>	<b>Dates</b>
4/1	Dr. Robert Gilruth	1986-1987
4/2	Joseph "Guy" Thibodaux	1983-1998

4/3	Partial Transcripts	1989-1999
4/4	Joseph "Guy" Thibodaux, Max Faget, and Paul Purser	1996
4/5	Paul G. Dembling	1998
4/6	Chris Kraft	1998
4/7	Dr. Eilene Galloway	1998
4/8	Kenneth B. Gilbreath	2003
4/9	Caldwell C. Johnson	Undated
4/10	"Commentary on the Pappas/Purser Career & Life Parallels" By Paul E. Purser	Undated

**Series XI: Artwork (Oversize)**

<b>Box/Folder</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>	<b>Date</b>
5/1	"Just Retired" Tri-fold drawing w/ Signatures	circa 1980
5/2	"Program Office Decision Maker"	Undated

**Series XII: Periodicals (Oversize)**

<b>Box/Folder</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>	<b>Dates</b>
5/3	La Recherche Aerospatiale. "Propulseur Sphérique a Propergol Solide Bi-Composition" by Pierre LaRue	November-December 1965
5/4	The Lincoln Star. "Astronauts Race Time...Not Russians, Says Expert"	1966
5/5	AIAA. "Apollo Spacecraft" by George M. Low	1969
5/6	Defense Management Journal. "I Dreamed We Went Nowhere in Our Solid Gold Airplane Shuttle" by O.C. Boileau	1976
5/7	The New Yorker. "Annals of Space: We Don't Have	1991



to Prove Ourselves.”

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|---------|--|------------------|
| 5/8     | Prologue: Quarterly of the National Archives.<br>“‘Never Was Life More Interesting:’ The<br>National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics,<br>1936-1945” by Roger D. Launius | Winter 1992      |
| 5/9     | Nasaproblems.com. “Say ‘No’ to the Launch Service<br>Gap...Privatize the Space Shuttle” by Don A. Nelson   | October 9, 2007  |
| 5/10    | AIAA Houston Horizons. “Interview with Norman H.<br>Chaffee: Observations from a Long NASA Career”<br>by Sean Keefe  | Fall 2008        |
| 5/Loose | Sentinel (Vol. VI, No. 4)  | February 3, 1964 |