

46th IAA HISTORY OF ASTRONAUTICS SYMPOSIUM (E4)  
Tribute to Wernher von Braun, born 100 years ago (3B)

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WILLY LEY: ROCKET SCIENTIST AND BOOK COLLECTOR

**Abstract**

Willy Ley was born on October 2, 1906. He was educated in Berlin and immigrated to England in 1935 and then to the United States in 1936. At an early age, he was interested in rocketry and, while still in Germany, helped form a club for rocketry enthusiasts, which was called the Verein für Raumschiffahrt or VfR (Society for Space Travel). In 1926, his book entitled *Die Fahrt ins den Weltraum* (Travel in Outer Space) was published in Germany. Upon arrival in the United States, he continued to write, edit, and serve as advisor for many technical projects. Early adventures in the United States included attempted mail delivery via a rocket glider. Book collecting was important to Ley, and he had amassed a library of over 5,000 books and journals. Upon his death in June, 1969, the book collection was bought by the University of Alabama in Huntsville. The book collection contains many rare and fascinating books. The personal documents of Willy Ley are in the Willy Ley Collection maintained by the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum Archives. Together, these collections tell a story of a man who understood rocket science, popularized the space effort in the United States, and collected a treasure trove of books.