

History of Rocketry and Astronautics

**Proceedings of the Thirty-Fourth History Symposium of
the International Academy of Astronautics**

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2000

Otfrid G. Liepack, Volume Editor

Donald C. Elder, Series Editor

AAS History Series, Volume 30

A Supplement to Advances in the Astronautical Sciences

IAA History Symposia, Volume 20

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AMERICAN ASTRONAUTICAL SOCIETY

AAS Publications Office
P.O. Box 28130
San Diego, California 92198

Affiliated with the American Association for the Advancement of Science
Member of the International Astronautical Federation

First Printing 2009

ISSN 0730-3564

ISBN 978-0-87703-549-7 (Hard Cover)

ISBN 978-0-87703-550-3 (Soft Cover)

Published for the American Astronautical Society
by Univelt, Incorporated, P.O. Box 28130, San Diego, California 92198
Web Site: <http://www.univelt.com>

Printed and Bound in the U.S.A.

In Memoriam: Victor Nikolaevich Sokolsky (1924–2002)

Professor Victor N. Sokolsky passed away on 2 February 2002 at the age of 77. Sokolsky, a trained historian scholar, in 1961 became the head of the newly created History of Aviation and Cosmonautics Department of the Institute of History of Sciences and Engineering at the then Soviet Academy of Sciences, today the Academy of Sciences of the Russian Federation. Under his leadership a new scientific-technical research approach to the history of rocketry and cosmonautics was introduced in the Soviet Union.



Victor N. Sokolsky (Photo: Courtesy of Russian Academy of Science).

He initiated the collection and publication of selected works of the most important Russian space scientists and engineers, such as Tsiolkovsky, Tsander, Korolev, and others, and thus made this historical information available to a larger audience. Sokolsky's own early scientific historical research work was published in 1963 in the renowned book on the "Russian Solid-Fuel Rockets" (*Rakety na tverdom toplive v Rossii*), which was translated into English in 1967. NASA later translated many of these documents into English. In the early 1960s, Sokolsky started organizing a continuous series of History of Aviation and Cosmonautics Symposia in Moscow, with many of the most famous Russian space scientists and engineers as speakers. In 1971, the first symposium with a larger international participation was held at the Moscow State University, and many were to follow in the 1980s and 1990s.



Victor N. Sokolsky in the Pavilion of Cosmonautics at the Exhibition of Economic Achievements, Moscow, on 26 September 1989.
(Photo: Courtesy of Å. I. Skoog)

Sokolsky, in 1963, became the first Soviet Union member of the History of the Development of Rockets and Astronautics Committee of the International Academy of Astronautics (IAA) and remained a member until his death in 2002. In 1968, he was elected Corresponding Member of the IAA, and in 1969 Full Member. Sokolsky was a strong supporter of the IAA History Committee work, and served first as vice-chair from 1970 to 1977 when he became co-chair of the committee leading the work until 1993. In 1983, he was awarded the IAA Academy Honorary Diploma for his contribution to the development of historical research and his publications on the history of rocketry and astronautics.

A main objective of the work of Sokolsky was the international dissemination of the results of the research on history of astronautics and rocketry carried out in the Soviet Union, and to make international research work known in the Soviet Union. Thus, he participated in all IAA History of Astronautics Symposia from 1967 to 1999, presented a number of papers throughout the years, and acted as session chair in all symposia from 1971 to 1999. He also, as an editor, had the early *IAA History Symposia Proceedings* translated into Russian and published at the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences.

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