



Spirit
of
St. Louis



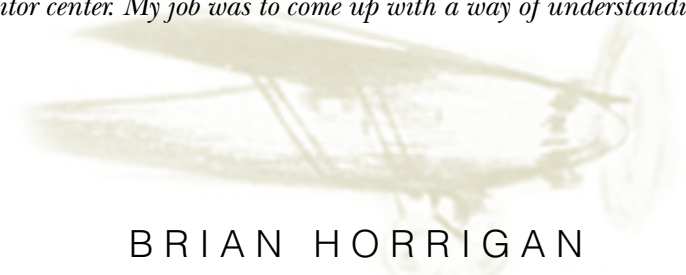
“My Own Mind and Pen”

CHARLES LINDBERGH,
AUTOBIOGRAPHY, AND MEMORY

***F**rom the moment that Charles Lindbergh landed in Paris on May 21, 1927, at the end of the world’s first solo, nonstop flight across the Atlantic Ocean, all possibility that he would ever again enjoy the pleasures of anonymity and privacy ended.*

Lindbergh quickly discovered that millions of people worldwide were demanding to know the details of his life. This shy, intense 25-year-old, who had spent many of his boyhood days on a farm in Minnesota, suddenly became the first media superstar of the twentieth century. He went on to lead a fabled, extraordinary life, and though fascination in “all things Lindbergh” dimmed over time, he never really faded from public consciousness, becoming almost mythical.

Lindbergh’s life is interpreted at several museums around the country—most notably the National Air and Space Museum, where his famous plane, the Spirit of St. Louis, is enshrined—but no site has the emotional resonance of his boyhood home in Little Falls, Minnesota. In 1999 I became part of the team from the Minnesota Historical Society charged with developing new exhibits for the site’s visitor center. My job was to come up with a way of understanding



BRIAN HARRIGAN

left: Charles Lindbergh with the Spirit of St. Louis, 1928

his life and presenting it to today's audiences. I signed on, in other words, to that small, self-selecting army of people who had been *Interpreting Lindbergh since 1927*.

Reading the biographies and autobiographies and poring over the Society's manuscript collections, photographs, and artifacts, I became fascinated not so much by Charles Lindbergh the aviator, or hero, or quixotic crusader, but by Lindbergh the teller of his own tale. I immersed myself in Lindbergh, examining not only his published works, how they were created, and how they were received, but also much of his correspondence and unpublished shards of memory. My goals have been to hold up to the light Lindbergh's lifelong passion for telling his own story and to understand how Lindbergh's written works collectively reveal the self that he meticulously and repeatedly constructed for nearly half of the twentieth century.



AT NO POINT IN HIS LIFE did writing come easily to Charles Lindbergh. In a 1922 letter, his father, C. A. Lindbergh, said that young Charles was “uncommonly sensible” but also “neglectful,” since he “dislikes to write a letter.” At each of the 11 different schools Charles attended before graduating from high school, he was a mediocre student. His three semesters in college were no better; late in life, he confessed that his mother had written some of his college papers for him. But if writing was not his *metier*, self-documentation seems to have been second nature. As a boy he had occasionally kept a journal—during his 1915 boat trip down the Mississippi with his father, for example, and on some of his motorcycle trips after high school. He was a diligent compiler of exhaustive lists, such as the one documenting all the trips he had made in his youth, which he then recorded—color-coded by type of conveyance—on a huge map of the United States. He took a camera on his travels and mounted his snapshots into neat albums. His “recording” personality served him well when he began his career as a pilot, always taking the time to make careful logs of his flights.¹

But when Lindbergh was suddenly thrust in 1927 into the glare of public attention, a deafening clamor arose for details about his life. He discovered that there were many who would leap into any void to meet this

demand and that fiction would serve them as well as facts. This shocking realization compelled him to attempt to take control of his own story, to become his own biographer. From the famous flight to the end of his life—a span of nearly 50 years—Lindbergh turned repeatedly to self-documentation and life-writing, sometimes in quickly jotted lists or journal entries, at other times in some of the most finely crafted prose ever to grace an American autobiography.

LINDBERGH'S BAPTISM by fire came in 1927. While in New York waiting for the right moment to take off for Paris, he contracted (for \$5000) with the *New York Times* for exclusive rights to the story of the flight, assuming that he succeeded. The front-page stories—bylined “Charles Lindbergh” but written by *Times* Paris correspondent Carlyle MacDonald—appeared in the weeks before Lindbergh's triumphant return to America. These and the thousands of other “Lindy” stories in newspapers and magazines that spring are the first chapters in a great American saga. They contain countless details, chronologies, characters, and incidents—some of them accurate, some of them fabricated. These are the stories that became the common coin of conversation in elevators and on telephones; that found their way into sermons, songs, vaudeville routines, children's games, and jokes; that were clipped and pasted into scrapbooks as home-made biographies; that constitute, in other words, myth and memory.²

Lindbergh was irritated by the inaccuracies in the newspaper stories and the many “instant” biographies that were beginning to appear—stories about the kitten he took with him on the flight (there was no cat) or about being a motorcycle speed demon (something he always denied). He contracted with publisher George Putnam to produce an autobiography, and Putnam, in turn, hired a ghostwriter, *Times* correspondent Carlyle MacDonald, who churned out a book in a matter of days. When it was submitted to Lindbergh for what was expected to be instant approval, he surprised everyone by rejecting it and promising to write the book himself. The press interpreted Lindbergh's decision as more evidence of his qualities of heroic self-determination and high-minded authenticity, of a piece not only with the flight but also with his well-publicized rejection of lucrative offers to appear in movies or vaudeville or to endorse commercial products. He sequestered himself for the month of July 1927 in the Long Island mansion

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LINDBERGH AND THE CAMERA'S EYE



Lindbergh in his room at the University of Wisconsin in Madison looking at one of his photo albums, later donated (with handwritten identifications) to the Minnesota Historical Society (below)

WITHIN A FEW WEEKS of his triumphant solo flight to Paris, Charles Lindbergh was being called the “World’s Most Photographed Person”—a title that, though unverifiable, was certainly believable. The camera loved Lindbergh, with his matinee-idol looks, unruly blonde locks, and grin.

Growing up for the most part as an only child surrounded by adults, Lindbergh was also the frequent target of family photographers. Like many middle-class Americans in the early 1900s, his family probably took their “snapshots” with brand-new, easy-to-use Kodak cameras.

By the age of ten or so, Charles was taking many photographs himself and keeping them in neat albums with stiff black-paper pages. In 1938 he donated three intact albums to the Minnesota Historical Society. They are interesting not just because they belonged to a famous person but also because they are relatively rare examples of early-twentieth-century photo albums kept by children or young adults. The albums contain photos taken in Little Falls, Detroit, Washington, D.C., and other places Lindbergh lived as a child; at the Panama Canal, under construction when 11-year-old Charles and his mother visited in 1913; at the Kentucky ROTC camp that the college boy attended in the summer of 1921; and at the two Army air cadet camps he attended in 1923–24 in Texas, where many of his shots documented airplane “crack-ups.”

Young Charles seems to have had a camera with him wherever he went. In his account of the 1915 rowboat trip with his father down the Mississippi, he mentions losing one camera and stopping off to buy another one. In *The Spirit of St. Louis*, in a flashback to his first parachute jump in 1922, he writes about reaching into his pocket and pulling out a camera to “photograph the ‘chute’s silhouette against the sky.” When Charles was away from home as a young man, he often sent film to his mother for developing. In one priceless letter, 19-year-old Lindbergh writes about a suitcase he is sending home: “Unpack it carefully. . . . There are quite a few pictures. Please have the rool [*sic*] of films developed and one print made of each. *Don’t throw anything away.* 2,176,343rd time.”*

The adult Lindbergh continued to take photographs from time to time, such as the pictures he made on survey flights in the 1930s with his wife, Anne, and the first snapshots of their tragically fated son, Charles Jr. Still, after May 1927, he was more often on the other side of the camera’s lens, hounded by photographers for “just one more shot.” He quickly grew to hate newspaper reporters and loathed even more deeply the photographers who inevitably accompanied them. He even occasionally took to wearing a disguise to avoid being recognized. The face of Lindbergh—once the “most photographed” in the world—gradually disappeared from sight.



* Journal, 1915, Charles A. Lindbergh and Family Papers, MHS; *The Spirit of St. Louis* (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1953), 259; Charles Lindbergh to Evangeline Lindbergh, July 19, 1921, Lindbergh Manuscript Collection, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.

of his friend Harry Guggenheim and wrote “just about all day long, every day. . . . My record for a single day was thirty five hundred words,” he later recalled. He made no attempt at rewriting or even re-reading sentences he had just written. Like a schoolboy who has been given an onerous assignment, Lindbergh kept track of the number of words he had written, noting the slowly mounting totals at the top of each page. He completed his work in three weeks, and “*We*” is, word-for-word, this manuscript.³

“*We*” reads like the dutiful book that it is. Lindbergh dispatches his childhood days in just 18 lines and tells his story almost entirely without emotion or personal reflection. A good deal of space is given over to tales about barnstorming, air cadet training, and flying the airmail, but he takes barely seven pages to fly from New York to Paris. Reviewers were respectful, although one critic wrote that “as an author Lindbergh is the world’s foremost aviator.” Most saw the book’s plainness and self-effacement as endearing reflections of the author’s character: “Here is modesty unadulterated . . . that apparently arises from a preoccupation with vocation so overwhelming that self never enters into consideration at all.”⁴

Although “*We*” went on to become one of the best-selling titles of the 1920s, Lindbergh firmly resisted all blandishments to produce a sequel. The day that “*We*” was finished was, I suspect, the day that Lindbergh believed and hoped he had finished with writing forever. He wanted to get on with his life as an aviator. Writing about himself for mass consumption meant that he was entangled in a phenomenon he had come to despise—the public’s craving for private information and the eagerness of journalists to provide it. He did not publish another word of memoir for more than 20 years.

Lindbergh’s annoyance with the press and self-appointed biographers intensified during his courtship and marriage to Anne Morrow Lindbergh in 1929 and hardened into a deep and abiding hatred after the kidnapping and death of their son, Charles Jr., in 1932. The publicity frenzy that surrounded not only the notorious crime but also the investigation, trial, and execution of suspect Bruno Hauptmann in 1936 was unprecedented in American history and has rarely been matched since.

LIVING IN ENGLAND AND FRANCE in the last years of the 1930s, away from the oppressive public attention in



Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh, photographed while reviewing an airline passenger route, 1933

America, Lindbergh became more relaxed and ruminative. He began to turn the biographical mirror onto himself through an extensive correspondence with Grace Lee Nute of the Minnesota Historical Society, who was planning to write a biography of Lindbergh’s father, who had died in 1924. In Lindbergh’s lengthy letters to Nute are the earliest versions of many of the childhood memories that he would revisit again and again over the next 50 years.⁵

Lindbergh’s partner in self-reflection was his wife, Anne. Already an emerging poet, writer, and diligent diarist at the time of her marriage, she became the major force in transforming Charles Lindbergh from the reluctant, mechanical stylist of “*We*” to the deeply reflective and passionate prose artist of *The Spirit of St. Louis*. Charles learned about writing by watching, listening to, and talking with her, especially as she achieved success in the 1930s with the best-selling tales of their aviation adventures together, *North to the Orient* and *Listen! the Wind*. Years later, as Charles grappled with writing *The Spirit of St. Louis*, Anne was his most

careful reader and critic, and he honored their collaboration with the famous dedication: “To A. M. L., who will never realize how much of this book she has written.”⁶

In December 1938, while living in Paris with Anne and their two small boys, Lindbergh penned the first few, highly self-conscious pages of memoir and then ceremoniously transcribed the draft into a gilt-edged blank book:

This is to be an autobiography. . . . I am looking forward with anticipation to living again the years of my childhood; meeting again friends who are dead, others whom I have forgotten as time has drifted in between us. I shall hunt partridges with my father in Minnesota, suffer through the hours in school in Washington, farm again on the banks of the Mississippi.⁷

There is a kind of poignancy to his anticipation as he sets out on this journey into the terrain of his past. These autobiographical sketches would remain fragmentary for many years, reappearing in much altered form as parts of later published works.

In the late 1930s Lindbergh also started earnestly keeping a journal. Living in Europe, witnessing the gathering clouds of war, he realized “that I was taking part in one of the great crises in world history,” and that there were many developments that “were bound to make a journal well worth keeping.” This was classic understatement. During the years covered in his journal—1938 to 1945—Lindbergh was again in the public spotlight, first for his outspoken prewar warnings about Germany’s military strength, then for his opposition to American entry into the war, and finally for his role as a civilian adviser to American fighter pilots in the South Pacific in 1944. Lindbergh kept these journals to provide points of reference for his future writing and thinking, not with an eye to publication, though they were edited and published in 1970 as *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh*.⁸

America’s entry into the war in 1941 silenced both the anti-interventionist America First movement and Lindbergh, its principal spokesman. For nearly seven years, Lindbergh did not publish a word, although he was writing more than ever before. He was making lengthy excursions into memoir (much of which found its way into *The Spirit of St. Louis*) and, especially after

LINDBERGH: A LIFE

CHARLES A. LINDBERGH JR. was born on February 4, 1902, in Detroit, the only son of Evangeline Lodge Land and C. A. Lindbergh, a lawyer from Little Falls, Minnesota. The family soon returned to Minnesota, where Charles spent much of his childhood on a farm on the banks of the Mississippi. After 1907, when C. A. began his first term in Congress, and for most of the next ten years, the family wintered in Washington, D.C. By 1918 America was involved in the war in Europe, and Charles left high school in Little Falls to run the farm year-round. In 1920 he entered the University of Wisconsin but dropped out during his second year in order to pursue his dream of learning to fly airplanes. He spent some time barnstorming around the country and then enlisted in Army Air Cadet training, graduating in 1925. He next moved to St. Louis and became the chief pilot for a private airline company, flying the airmail between St. Louis and Chicago.

In 1927 Lindbergh threw his hat into the ring for the Orteig Prize—\$25,000 to be awarded for the first nonstop airplane flight between New York and Paris. With the financial backing of several St. Louis businessmen, Lindbergh and engineers at Ryan Airlines in San Diego designed and built a plane—the *Spirit of St. Louis*. He took off from New York on the morning of May 20, 1927, and landed in Paris 33 hours and 28 minutes later, touching off ecstatic celebrations on both sides of the Atlantic. After his return to the states, he flew the *Spirit* to every state in the union, and later to Mexico and Central America. Then he threw himself into promoting commercial aviation.

In May 1929 Charles Lindbergh married Anne Spencer Morrow, the daughter of the U. S. ambassador to Mexico, Dwight Morrow. In 1931, after the birth of their first child, the Lindberghs made a flight to China, surveying air routes, with Anne acting as navigator and radio operator. Then, after settling into a secluded home in rural New Jersey, tragedy struck. The Lindberghs’ son—“Baby Lindy,”

as the press called him—was kidnapped on March 1, 1932. Several weeks later the baby's body was found, and the kidnapping became a murder case. In 1934 German immigrant Bruno Richard Hauptmann was arrested for what was being called the "crime of the century." He was tried, convicted, and executed in 1936.

During these tragic years, Charles and Anne escaped into the world of aviation with a months-long tour in 1933 around the Atlantic in a two-seater plane. Back in the New York, Charles went to work in the Rockefeller Institute laboratories of surgeon and Nobel laureate Alexis Carrel, with whom he developed a lifelong friendship. Carrel and his associates were working on techniques to maintain organs outside the body, and Charles—who had always wanted to work in scientific fields—became a valued member of Carrel's inner circle.

To protect themselves and their second child from the glare of publicity, the Lindberghs moved to England in December 1935 and spent the next several years there and in France. Lindbergh became alarmed at the increasing tensions in Europe, which seemed to be leading to another world war. Based on his assessments of Nazi air power, made at the request of the U. S. embassy in Berlin, he concluded that Germany's strength would overwhelm armed forces in France and England, but he also believed that the Soviet Union posed the greater threat to Western Europe. Lindbergh carried his message back to the U.S. in 1939, where he soon became the most prominent spokesman for the "America First" movement opposing U.S. involvement in a European war. Lindbergh's open admiration for Germany's "spirit"—

coupled with his denunciation on September 11, 1941, of Jews, the British government, and the Roosevelt administration as the "three forces" leading America into war—revolted and outraged many Americans.

When the U. S. fleet was attacked at Pearl Harbor in 1941, compelling American entry into the war, Lindbergh ceased his anti-interventionist activities. He went to work for the Ford Motor Company in Detroit as a technical consultant on bomber production and in 1944 flew 50 combat missions in the South Pacific while serving as a civilian adviser on fighter planes.

After the war, Lindbergh continued aviation consulting. He also worked countless hours on the manuscript for his best-known book, *The Spirit of St. Louis*, which appeared in 1953. Over the next 20 years, he became increasingly involved with environmental causes and wildlife preservation, writing articles and working with nonprofit conservation groups around the world. He died on August 26, 1974, and was buried near his home in Hawaii.

New York tickertape parade, June 1927



the war, engaging in a type of self-reflective philosophical writing that he had never attempted before.

In 1948 Lindbergh returned to the public eye with the phenomenally popular *Of Flight and Life*. Just 60 pages long, the book is not a memoir as such, but it finds Lindbergh in high autobiographical mode. In the first half are first-person stories of a life-threatening moment during a military test flight, aerial combat against Japanese fighters, and his inspection tour of a bombed-out Nazi work camp in Germany. In the controversial second part of the book, Lindbergh issued a passionate jeremiad on the prospect of an “Atomic Age war” and the potential collapse of western civilization and spiritual values. He also made something of a confession: “Like most of modern youth, I worshipped science. I was awed by its knowledge. . . . Now. . . . I have seen the science I worshipped, and the aircraft I loved, destroying the civilization I expected them to serve, and which I thought as permanent as the earth itself.” Coming from the avatar of modernity, this sounded like heresy. Even more stunning was the book’s spirituality and almost messianic tone: “Our salvation, and our only salvation, lies in controlling the arm of western science by the mind of a western philosophy guided by the eternal truths of God.”⁹

Charles Scribner, who published *Of Flight and Life*, was thrilled with its success and even more excited to hear from its famous author in November 1950 that he “might eventually have another book.” Scribner was soon to discover that behind this cautiously phrased promise was a nearly completed manuscript—*The Spirit of St. Louis*.¹⁰

In his preface, Lindbergh called *The Spirit of St. Louis* “a book about flying, and an aviator’s life.”¹¹ It is certainly that, and more. He completed what he later recognized as the first draft of this classic American epic in 1939 and returned to the burgeoning manuscript off and on for the next 14 years.

More than 500 pages in length, *Spirit* is at least three books in one. Part I, “The Craft,” is a fast-paced narrative, complete with dialogue and rapid changes of scene, of the events leading up to the night before the takeoff from Long Island on May 20, 1927. Part II, “New York to Paris,” is a surprisingly suspenseful, hour-by-hour account of the adventure, ending with the landing at Le Bourget. Finally, interlaced throughout Part II are passages of evocative memoir, rendered as “flashbacks” in cinematic style. The book’s drama,

unity, and sheer mastery of narrative form absolutely stunned critics and lay readers alike. Here was the “Lindbergh Story,” well known to anyone over a certain age, but now rendered with a vivacity and piercing kind of truth that was completely fresh. Brilliantly innovative in structure and style, *The Spirit of St. Louis* was the rare combination of critical and commercial success, and it was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in biography in 1954.

Lindbergh, ever the documentarian of self, preserved a meticulous record of his pathway back into this familiar story. In 1954 he deposited at the Library of Congress all of his drafts for *The Spirit of St. Louis*, along with notes, rejected pages, book galleys, reviews, clippings, and correspondence. The drafts alone—numbering from 8 to 11, depending on how one counts them—total more than 17,000 manuscript pages, many handwritten.¹²

It is clear from the early drafts that Lindbergh did not at first envision the book’s unique weave of autobiography and aviation adventure. But in a 1944 draft, minutely handwritten pages of flashback memoir begin to appear as inserts into the previously written New York-to-Paris section, rendered as thoughts and memories drifting through the pilot’s sleepy consciousness. This device seems to have grown organically out of the forays into memoir that Lindbergh began writing in 1938, as well as his earnest efforts to remember details of the flight and to “reconstruct”—or to imagine anew—his mental wanderings over its 33 hours. Mimicking the processes of memory itself, Lindbergh places these passages out of sequence, in bits and snatches, as images that suddenly emerge and quickly fade. His goal, as he wrote in his preface, was “to attain impressionistic truth.” Once this Niagara of memory began, he found it difficult to shut it off. By the time he submitted a manuscript in 1952, Part II was just about equally divided between his account of the flight and sequences of memory, many of which were later cut.¹³

Lindbergh wrote the first lengthy flashback, dated August 1944, while in New Guinea. It begins: “When I was young, after the winter’s school was over, my mother took me in the spring to our farm in Minnesota. After the long hours on the train were over, we stepped down onto the platform of the station house in Little Falls . . . and began the long walk over wood paths and roads to our farm.” In the course of several handwritten pages, the memories pour out—of the farm, of his grandparents’ house in Detroit, of learning



Anne Lindbergh in her study at the family's summer home in Maine writing *North to the Orient*, published in 1935

how to drive the family's Model T—with the actualities of flying the plane occasionally returning.¹⁴

It is interesting to note that Lindbergh's first reflections on the past in the manuscript are directly linked with a passage that became the most commented-on part of the book: the appearance, during the twenty-second hour of the flight, of "ghostly presences" that filled the fuselage behind him. The first mention of "disembodied beings" had been in his 1939 fragmentary draft. They became more elaborated with every subsequent draft, and they are here used to introduce his boyhood memories. Lindbergh never dismisses the "phantoms" as hallucinations induced by sleep deprivation but rather embraces them as "emanations from the experience of ages, inhabitants of a universe closed to mortal men. I'm on the border line of life and a greater realm beyond."¹⁵

For Lindbergh, these phantoms are "like a gathering of family and friends after years of separation, as though I've known all of them before in some past incarnation." He concludes: "I live in the past, the present, and the future, here and in different places, all at once. Around me are old associations, bygone friendships, voices from ancestrally distant times."

For several years after the war, Lindbergh seems to have done only minor tinkering on his manuscript. Then, late in 1948, came an extraordinary burst of activity—and a major shift in style. Going through an earlier draft, he literally changed every verb from the past tense to the present, thus giving the book its ultimate, distinctive voice, as well as its immediacy and surprising momentum. Readers—nearly every one of them familiar with the saga—found themselves racing through the book to see how it ended. Explaining his

decision to an interviewer in 1953, Lindbergh said, “When I slipped into the present tense, the years fell away. I could strip them off, live the boy’s life again, see the happenings more vividly, in much greater detail, and more accurately.”¹⁶

Published in 1953, Lindbergh’s book could hardly have appeared at a better time. Bookstores were brimming with tales of manly bravery and endurance, such as *Kon-Tiki* and *Annapurna* and Hemingway’s *Old Man and the Sea*. But unlike its confreres, *The Spirit of St. Louis* was also a book of memory and history, and it tapped a deep reservoir of nostalgia. The middle-aged readers of the 1950s had been the youth of the 1920s, and many of them, like Lindbergh himself, had matured through their experiences in World War II. *The Spirit of St. Louis* gave them a one-way ticket back to 1927. As Brendan Gill wrote in the *New Yorker*, “We had known Lindbergh the aviator, Lindbergh the scientist, and Lindbergh the man of political action, but we had not known Lindbergh the artful rememberer of things past.”¹⁷

The great success of *The Spirit of St. Louis*, and the fact that it covered Lindbergh’s life only up to the triumphant year of 1927, led many to assume that another volume or two was in the works. And in fact, just such a hint was contained in *Spirit* itself. In the last line of the afterword, Lindbergh wrote, “But the account of my experiences abroad, of my homecoming to the United States, and of my gratitude to the peoples of Europe and America, belongs to a different story.” He even set up a plan to deposit in a safe at Scribner’s sealed envelopes containing pieces of the new manuscript he was already working on.¹⁸

The “bits of manuscript” that Lindbergh was writing at the time would probably not have satisfied a sequel-hungry publisher. Even while working on the manuscript that became *The Spirit of St. Louis*, Lindbergh was exploring more of the undiscovered country of his memory, slowly preparing a large-scale autobiographical work. His efforts to recover and record memories



Lindbergh’s flight sparked dozens of parlor-music songs.

intensified in 1953 and 1954 but never coalesced into anything that he considered publishable.

One of the most astounding documents among Lindbergh’s unpublished writings is an August 1957 outline for the inchoate autobiography. In more than 35 pages of minute handwriting, Lindbergh compiled a chronological list of literally hundreds of details—names, dates, servant’s names, dogs’ names, friends, anecdotes, snatches of conversations, birth dates and places of all the children (including Charles Jr.), Anne’s books, the houses they lived in, wartime memories, and on and on. Most remarkable is what is missing:

any mention of the kidnapping or its aftermath. There are no self-conscious gaps, no glancing references or euphemisms. It is simply omitted.¹⁹

Lindbergh struggled mightily with this magnum opus for more than three decades. Finally, in August 1974, when he knew that he was dying, he turned over to his friend and publisher William Jovanovich more than a thousand typed pages of autobiographical writings and ruminations and nearly as many pages of related notes. Working with Yale University archivist Judith Schiff, Jovanovich shaped the manuscript into *Autobiography of Values*, published posthumously in 1978.

Values was never meant to be conventional autobiography. Chapters do line up more or less chronologically, but some events—the prewar years in Europe, his anti-interventionist stance before Pearl Harbor, his work with scientist Alexis Carrel—are treated at far greater length than memories that cut closer to the heart. In a chapter called “Out of Eden” he recalls, for the first time in print, the development of his attitudes toward women and marriage and his determination, in 1928, to find a mate. His “girl-meeting project,” as he called it, ended that fall when he renewed his acquaintance with Anne Spencer Morrow. Still, Lindbergh never really describes his feelings for Anne in this book, and he sets the story of their courtship, engagement, and wedding into the familiar frame of harassment

by newspapermen. Not that *Values* is an emotionally empty work: far from it. The book contains passionate reveries on mortality, reincarnation, and the nature of being, with deeply personal strands woven through. Lindbergh writes of scattering from an airplane the cremated remains of his father who, as a U.S. congressman, had opposed entry into World War I: "Death transferred him from life back into matter. . . . I sense himself in me. . . . There are times when my reactions are identical with my memory of his—as though I actually were my father remembering the past, continuing in life beyond death."²⁰

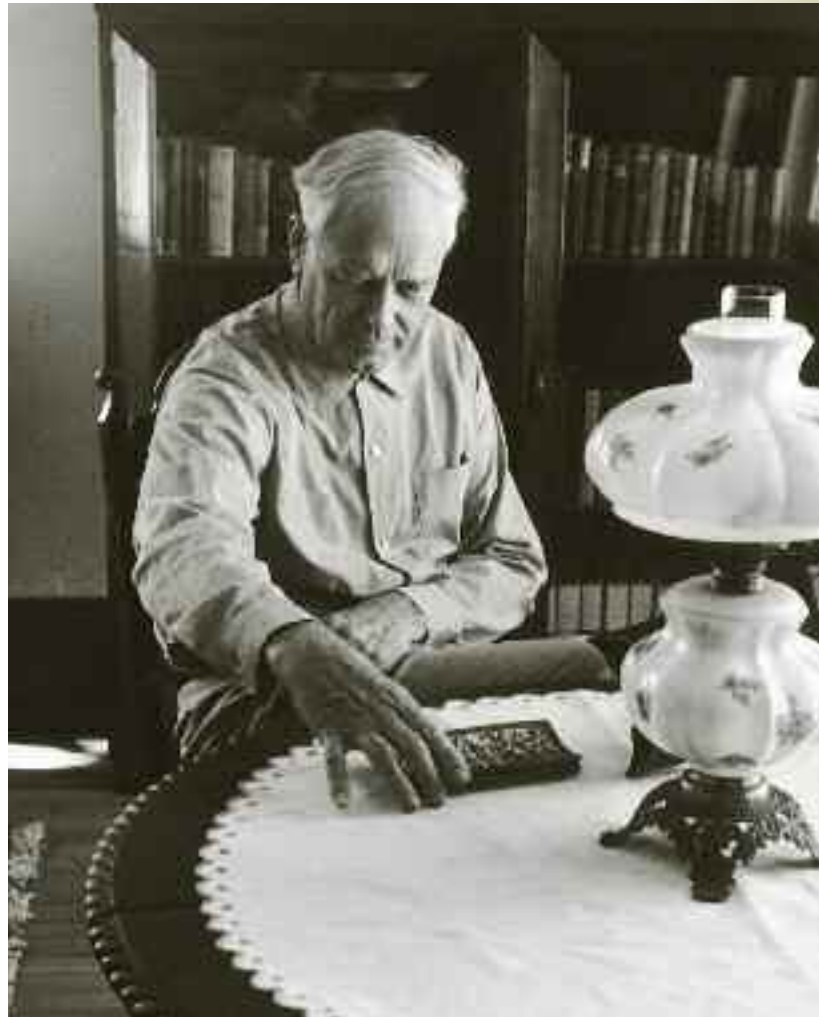
Especially toward the end of his life, Lindbergh's autobiographical "project" extended into several other areas. Beginning in 1968, he wrote extensive, line-by-line refutations of several biographies, both recent ones (such as Walter S. Ross's *The Last Hero: Charles A. Lindbergh*) and a few that had appeared in 1927 (such as George Buchanan Fife's *Lindbergh, the Lone Eagle*). Clearly, the meticulous Lindbergh considered it not only necessary but also immensely satisfying to correct the myths and "concoctions" that had adhered to him for more than 40 years. The intended audience for these typewritten pages seems to have been future scholars, who would weigh his rebuttals against the biographies and, presumably, find in favor of Lindbergh. But with all of the globe-hopping work for environmental causes that Lindbergh was engaged in at the time, his biographical commentaries project has an oddly redundant, quixotic character.²¹

During the late 1960s, Lindbergh also cooperated with several historians, such as Minnesotan Bruce Larson, who was working on a project close to Lindbergh's heart: a biography of his father. Beginning in 1966, Lindbergh consented to several interviews with Larson but insisted that a tape recorder not be used. His 32-page commentary on a set of interview notes constitutes one of the most detailed records of his younger days that he ever wrote.²²

Finally, when he was in his mid-60s, Lindbergh reestablished a physical relationship with his fondly remembered home on the banks of the Mississippi where the Minnesota Historical Society was developing a new interpretive program. Between 1966 and 1973 Lindbergh visited the site at least seven times and wrote down his reminiscences of life on the farm as background for the staff—the letters that became *Boyhood on the Upper Mississippi* in 1972, reissued this year by the

Minnesota Historical Society Press as *Lindbergh Looks Back*. Lindbergh also made audio recordings of several passages from *The Spirit of St. Louis* for use at the site and offered advice on the original exhibits in the Visitor Center, dedicated in 1973. It was an extraordinary relationship between a historical organization and a living figure stepping out of the pages of history. A historic house dedicated to interpreting the life of an individual is, at least in the best of them, a biography told in space, structure, and landscape. With Lindbergh in Little Falls, the house became one step more intimate and revealing—a virtual autobiography in three dimensions.

Lindbergh in the living room of his boyhood home in Little Falls, 1971



WHEN LINDBERGH, with great seriousness of purpose, began writing his memoirs in 1938, he said that he wanted “to make an attempt to set down my own character and actions in my own manner and through my own mind and pen.” He was only 36 years old, and he realized that life-review at this point might seem precocious. He knew that if he waited until he was older, “possibly the story would be better told . . . but then I may never reach forty or fifty and it might not be told at all. Besides, it can always be rewritten.”²³

Charles Lindbergh did, indeed, find the opportunity to rewrite his story, many times. His autobiographical works were his way of staking permanent claim to what he believed to be his property: the story of his life. Each was, in its way, an act of defiance, facing stiff competition from journalists and biographers and other eager chroniclers of fame. But as concordances on the Lindbergh life, his autobiographical works are incomplete, and purposely so. “A regular biography implies a comprehensive story of one’s life,” Lindbergh admonished an importuning bio-

grapher in 1972, and “I do not want to lay my life out on a platter for public consumption.” Much of Lindbergh’s story remains unpublished—not simply because many pages of memoir ended up in the discard file, but because many pages were never written at all.²⁴

But as art, Lindbergh’s works can be immensely satisfying, for he understood that memory draws its power not from scientific accuracy but from its fluidity, its

painterly nature. As he wrote in his preface to *The Spirit of St. Louis*: “Searching memory might be compared to throwing the beam of a strong light, from your hilltop camp site, back over the road you traveled by day. Only a few of the objects you passed are clearly illuminated; countless others are hidden behind them, screened from the rays. There is bound to be some vagueness and distortion in the distance. But memory has advantages that compensate for its failings. By eliminating detail, it clarifies the picture as a whole. Like an artist’s brush, it finds higher value in life’s essence than in its photographic intricacy.”²⁵ □



A Minnesota woman reads a newspaper headlined “Lindy Baby Dead” while her husband listens to a radio report, May 1932

NOTES

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1. C. A. Lindbergh to Eva Lindbergh Christie, undated (ca. 1922), Charles A. Lindbergh and Family Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul. On his college papers, see his commentary on *Lindbergh, the Lone Eagle*, Charles A. Lindbergh Papers, series V, Yale University Library, Manuscripts and Archives, New Haven. Lindbergh's youthful journals, some flight logs, photo albums, and the map of his travels are in the MHS collections.

2. The 16-part series, "Lindbergh's Own Story," ran from May 23 to June 14, 1927.

3. "Lindbergh Works Hard to Complete his Book," *New York Times*, July 2, 1927; Lindbergh, "Comments on re-reading 'We,'" 1971, Lindbergh papers, series V, Yale. Lindbergh's handwritten manuscript and the rejected galleys are in the Lindbergh Manuscript Collection, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.

4. Leon Whipple, "Lindbergh Writes His Log," *The Survey*, Oct. 1, 1927, p. 50; "Icarus Triumphant," *Saturday Review of Literature*, Aug. 6, 1927, p. 22-23.

5. Grace Lee Nute correspondence, Lindbergh papers, MHS. Nute never completed the biography.

6. Anne Morrow Lindbergh, *North to the Orient* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1935), and *Listen! the Wind* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1938).

7. Unpublished fragment, Dec. 1938, Lindbergh papers, series V, Yale.

8. Lindbergh to William Jovanovich, Dec. 18, 1969, in *The Wartime Journals of Charles A. Lindbergh* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), xiii. In the late 1960s Jovanovich persuaded Lindbergh to prepare the journals for publication.

When transcribed, they totaled more than 3,000 typewritten pages. *The Wartime Journals* is still a thousand-page tome.

9. *Of Flight and Life* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 50-51, 56.

10. Scribner to Lindbergh, Nov. 30, 1950, Lindbergh papers, series I, Yale.

11. Charles A. Lindbergh, *The Spirit of St. Louis* (1953; reprint, St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1993), xv.

12. *The Spirit of St. Louis* Collection, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

13. *Spirit*, xvi; J. H. Wheelock to Lindbergh, Apr. 1, 1952, Lindbergh papers, series I, Yale.

14. *Spirit* collection, Library of Congress.

15. Here and below, *Spirit*, 389-90.

16. Lauren D. Lyman, "How Lindbergh Wrote a Book," *The Beehive* (United Aircraft in-house magazine), Summer 1954, p. 19.

17. "The Doom of Heroes," *New Yorker*, Sept. 19, 1953, p. 110-13.

18. *Spirit*, 501; Wheelock to Lindbergh, July 2, 1952, June 3, 1953, Lindbergh papers, series I, Yale.

19. Lindbergh would eventually write a few tersely worded pages about the kidnapping, which were included in the posthumous *Autobiography of Values*. The Lindbergh papers at Yale University Library contain many files of this later material, most of it called "Autobiography—untitled." See also introduction to *Autobiography of Values* and Judith Schiff, "The Literary Lindbergh Is Celebrated at Yale," *Yale Alumni Magazine and Journal* 15 (Apr. 1977): 14-22.

20. *Autobiography*, 122-28, 396.

21. The most extensive collection of these commentaries is in the Lindbergh papers at Yale; copies of some are in the Library of Congress and the Minnesota Historical Society.

22. Bruce Larson, *Lindbergh of Minnesota: A Political Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973).

23. Unpublished fragment, Dec. 1938, Lindbergh papers, series V, Yale.

24. Lindbergh to Ray Fredette, Dec. 4, 1972, Lindbergh papers, series X, Yale.

25. *Spirit*, xv-xvi.



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