

**Podcast:** The Pig War and Pelican Girls Companion Podcast  
**Episode:** 03  
**Title:** Viking Phones Home  
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**Time:** 6:29  
**Breaks:** No breaks

*[Gerald Ford clip]*

*[Theme up and under]*

July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1976. It was a pleasant sunny summer day in Washington, D.C. In only three days, the United States would be celebrating its bicentennial, 200 years of the great experiment.

Hundreds of invited dignitaries and guests gathered outside of a new museum that was set to open on the national mall; a museum dedicated to the nation's incredible aviation and space achievements – the Smithsonian's National Air & Space Museum. But what made this opening so special wasn't the people in attendance, it was who – or what, actually – performed the ribbon cutting.

Welcome to “The Pig War and the Pelican Girls: Forgotten Stories from American History.” I'm Joe Cuhaj.

*[Theme fade]*

This series is a companion podcast to my latest Prometheus book, “The Pig War and the Pelican Girls,” which recalls long forgotten tales of American history.

Today, we take you back to that day in 1976 and an appropriate grand opening for a new museum.

*[NASA clip on importance of Viking]*

Viking was a unique spacecraft for its time. It would be a two part mission to the planet Mars. One half of the vehicle would orbit the planet and send scientific data back to Earth, while the other half would land on its surface becoming the first manmade visitor to the Martian surface.

The lander was equipped with a robotic arm that would scoop up soil and examine it.

*[NASA clip about the mission]*

On June 20, 1976, almost one year after its launch, Viking 1 entered orbit around Mars and on July 20<sup>th</sup>, the lander detached and headed for the surface.

*[Landing clip]*

While the spacecraft silently orbited the red planet, on July 1<sup>st</sup>, some 240 million miles away, President Gerald Ford greeted those gathered at the new museum with a few opening remarks.

*[Ford clip]*

And then, something extraordinary happened. Engineers at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory had another version of Viking, an engineering model to test the spacecraft here on Earth. That lander's robotic arm was removed and sent to the museum.

The arm was positioned on a podium in front of the museum's entrance which was blocked by a ceremonial yellow ribbon. The arm was also connected digitally to Viking 1 orbiting Mars. The President, Apollo 11 astronaut Michael Collins, and the gathered crowd waited anxiously for a signal to arrive from Mars and the Viking spacecraft.

*[Engineer comments]*

It worked! The robotic arm received the signal and the arm cut the ribbon to officially open the National Air & Space Museum.

*[Theme up and under]*

As for the Viking orbiter and lander, the lander was only expected to operate for 90 days. In the end, it lasted for two more years before shutting down. The orbiter continued sending data back to Earth for four more years.

I'm Joe Cuhaj and thank you for joining me for "The Pig War and the Pelican Girls," a companion podcast to my latest Prometheus book of the same name that recalls long forgotten tales of American history, available at your favorite local and online book store.

My thanks go out to NASA, the Gerald Ford Presidential Library, and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory for clips used in this episode. You can view these clips online at [joe-cuhaj.com/podcast](http://joe-cuhaj.com/podcast) (Cuhaj is spelled "C-U-H-A-J") and click on the PIG WAR link.

Our theme song is called "Creative Minds" by Benjamin Tissot and is courtesy of BenSounds.Com.

If you liked this obscure tale of American history, then please, share it with a friend. I hope you'll join me again next time for another forgotten tale from American history.

*[Theme out]*