

UC SANTA BARBARA

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UCSB Historian to Discuss Citizen-Scientists and the Dawn of the Space Age

When the first Sputniks were launched 50 years ago by the former Soviet Union, thousands of teenagers, homemakers, teachers, and other science enthusiasts organized themselves into a worldwide network of satellite spotters. While largely forgotten today, contributions from these unknown citizen-scientists played a critical role in the early space age.

In a talk titled "Look! Look! Up in the Sky! Citizen-Scientists and Sputnik: The Dawn of the Space Age," W. Patrick McCray, a professor of history at the University of California, Santa Barbara, will discuss the little-known story of Operation Moonwatch, an amateur science program initiated by the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory in 1956. Its initial goal was to enlist the aid of amateur astronomers and other citizens in helping professional scientists spot the first artificial satellites.

Sponsored by the UCSB History Associates, McCray's talk will take place Monday, October 15, at 5:30 p.m. at the Karpeles Manuscript Library, 21 West Anapamu Street. A reception at 5 p.m. precedes the lecture. The event is free and the public is invited to attend. Advance registration is recommended by calling the UCSB Office of Community Relations at 893-4388.

The Karpeles Museum will present a special exhibit from its Space Age collection to complement McCray's talk.

McCray specializes in American science during the Cold War, the history of modern physical science and technology, and the history of early modern craft technologies. He is also a researcher at UCSB's Center for Nanotechnology in Society. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Arizona in 1996. He is the author of the forthcoming book "Keep Watching the Skies: The Story of Operation Moonwatch and the Dawn of the Space Age," to be published by Princeton University Press. His other publications include "Giant Telescopes: Astronomical Ambition and the Promise of Technology" (Harvard University Press, 2004) and "Glassmaking in Renaissance Venice: The Fragile Craft" (Ashgate Publishing, 1999).

For more information, visit www.ia.ucsb.edu/comrel/index.shtml

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