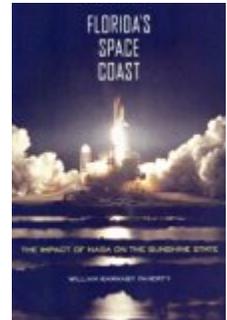




William Barnaby Faherty; S.J. *Florida's Space Coast: The Impact of NASA on the Sunshine State*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002. xix + 205 pp. \$24.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8130-2563-6.



Reviewed by Bettyann Kevles

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William Barnaby Faherty chronicles the story of the NASA complex that people around the world identify as the heart of America's space program--the Kennedy Space Center. Commissioned as the twenty-first in a series of books about Florida history and culture, it is the story of the impact of rocketry on Brevard County, a strip fifteen to twenty miles wide and seventy miles long with an elbow of land called Cape Canaveral that juts into the Atlantic Ocean. Faherty takes us from NASA's colonization of this sleepy, agricultural backwater by 25,000 engineers and scientists in the early 1960s through the end of the twentieth century.

Faherty was an inspired choice as author. Between 1972 and 1974 he lived at the Cape in order to research and co-write, with Charles D. Benson, *Gateway to the Moon Launch*, a history of the Apollo program. During those years he interviewed NASA employees and became an active member of the growing community.

Today Faherty is professor emeritus at St. Louis University and director of the Museum of the Western Jesuit Missions in Hazelwood, Missouri. As a Jesuit, his personal milestones as a his-

torian are understandably parochial in the true sense of the word. While researching the book on Apollo he lived in the rectory of St. Theresa's church in Titusville. There, on weekends, he assisted the two young Irish priests with their clerical duties. The Catholic congregation grew along with the space center, which was renamed the Kennedy Space Center after the assassination of the President.

Faherty tracks the growth of Titusville and nearby Melbourne as they attracted aerospace offices from companies including Boeing, McDonnell Douglas, Grumman, Lockheed, GE, and North American Aviation. He also charts the growth in church memberships from the first days when sparse numbers led to combined services to the growth of many churches, synagogues, and the community activities that follow like scouting and service groups.

Faherty, young during the Cold War, remembers Sputnik II, the Soviet spacecraft that carried the doomed mongrel Laika, as the Soviets declaration of a space war. Occasionally he writes as if back in those days, as when he describes John F.

Kennedy as a serious supporter of space exploration when he announced that the United States would send a man to the moon and bring him back safely, rather than a leader in need of deflecting attention from the diplomatic failures of the Bay of Pigs and the Berlin Wall. Faherty's Kennedy is still a knight in Camelot, an image that many historians have rejected in the light of forty years of documented irregularities.

Faherty describes the years in which the Mercury astronauts--"the last Americans to fly solo--flew, 1963 to 1965, as a period when this strange new breed of man was established as something larger than ordinary life, with gallantry ... beyond the common experience." He does not continue their stories to when some of them revealed feet of clay. Likewise, when he mentions the flight of the Soviet Valentina Tereshkova in 1963, he does not comment on the fact that there would be no American women astronauts for another twenty years.

Yet these uncritical observations notwithstanding, Faherty's narrative is packed with fascinating insights about that special time and place and how it changed the lives of everyone in America, including the people in Brevard County. Faherty's greatest contribution to the story is his account of the way NASA changed the texture of life in Brevard County where the population not only grew very rapidly, but changed, the white community expanding while the numbers of African Americans diminished. Everyone who worked for NASA lived under the stress of the deadline to reach the moon by the end of the decade. There was even an epidemic of ulcers among the children of NASA's employees. Responding to problems among the workers' families in 1963, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara authorized the Air Force for the first time to let visitors drive through the Cape on Sundays; this enabled wives and children to see what their husbands and dads did. For at least another decade, this kind of tour was the only contact American women had with

the space program at the Cape. Yet women eventually joined the work force at the Cape. And these new Floridians helped build more and better high schools and colleges there and grew aerospace businesses in their own communities.

Revisiting the Cape brought a fresh perspective to William Faherty. The wave of privatizing that swept the entire economy in the nineties did not miss Florida, and Faherty has doubts about its benefits. He is uneasy with the KSC's Visitor Complex now in private hands and charging fees for what had formerly been free to the public. Looking back he recounts the growth of the Center and its work force, the development of rockets and the shuttle, with pride.

He recalls the impact of the Apollo flights on the world and quotes the poet Anne Morrow Lindbergh who, inspired by the sight and then the voices of men talking from the moon, wrote: "Man had to free himself from earth to perceive both its diminutive place in the solar system and its inestimable value as a life-fostering planet." Apollo changed Faherty's life, and the lives of people everywhere. And Brevard County, Faherty tells us, acknowledged a personal debt to the astronauts in 1973 when it changed the county seal to include one of the moonscapes from an Apollo landing.

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