

Canadian university head proposed rocket spaceflight in 1861

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This is the "South Pillar" region of the star-forming region called the Carina Nebula. Like cracking open a watermelon and finding its seeds, the infrared telescope "busted open" this murky cloud to reveal star embryos tucked inside finger-like pillars of thick dust. Credit: NASA

Rocket-based spaceflight was proposed 30 years earlier than previously thought by a Canadian university head, a space historian says.

Historian Robert Godwin says William Leitch of Queen's University in

Kingston, Ontario, accurately described the concept of reaching space by [rocket](#) in 1861.

Previous histories of spaceflight credited Russian Konstantin Tsiolkovsky and American Robert Goddard with the first scientific proposals of rocket-powered space travel in the late 1800s.

Both claimed science-fiction author Jules Verne as their inspiration. Godwin says Leitch published his thoughts four years before Verne's famous "space gun" in "From the Earth to the Moon."

Godwin's findings were published Sunday in "The First Scientific Concept of Rockets for Space Travel."

Godwin says Leitch was a scientist who predicted that a rocket would work most efficiently [space](#)'s vacuum.

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