June 7   Robert Sember  
What I Learned About Alabama's Prison Crisis from Incarcerated Students Enrolled in a College Degree Program

Robert Sember will lead a discussion on the college program he helps run in two Alabama prisons. The program falls under the auspices of the Alabama Prison Arts and Education Project, which is based at Auburn University. The discussion of the education project will be the catalyst for observations regarding the Alabama prison system. This will include references to the case the Department of Justice brought against the Alabama Department of Correction in 2020 in which the DOJ alleges that “the conditions at Alabama’s prisons for men violate the Constitution because Alabama fails to provide adequate protection from prisoner-on-prisoner violence and prisoner-on-prisoner sexual abuse, fails to provide safe and sanitary conditions, and subjects prisoners to excessive force at the hands of prison staff.”

Robert Sember is trained in cultural studies, medical anthropology, and art. He is a member of the international sound-art collective, Ultra-red, which contributes sound-based practices to community organizing initiatives. Ultra-red’s collective listening practices, based on the principles of popular education, are used in anti-racist, anti-gentrification, and migrant rights struggles in the U.S. and Europe. Robert’s ethnographic research in the U.S. and South Africa has focused on governmental and non-governmental HIV/AIDS policies and programs and related concerns including homelessness, substance use, and mental health. Robert’s work has specifically focused on health justice and equitable treatment access. Most recently, he was presented with the Ally Award by the House Lives Matter movement, which addresses concerns specific to LGBTQ people of color.

June 21   Jim Barber  
The New Drought Age: Focusing on the USA

Jim Barber will examine how the water resources in many parts of the USA are being squandered, misspent, and polluted with very little or no long-range planning for replenishment or conservation.

Jim holds a BCE degree from Auburn University with additional studies at Villanova University, the University of Houston, and Sacramento State. He has 54 years of experience in construction, engineering design, project management, technical sales, and international shipping/transportation. Jim was a business owner/operator for 32 years. Science and history are at both ends of his happiness rainbow. His wife, Mary Frances is the entire rainbow.
July 12  Loretta Bennett Pettway  
A Patchwork History  

Loretta Pettway Bennett is a fifth-generation quilter from Gee’s Bend, Alabama, and one of about 50 Gee’s Bend quilters to continue hand quilting in the renowned Gee’s Bend style. She is the second of eight children and oldest daughter of Tom O. and Quinnie Elizabeth Pettway Jr. Her ancestry traces back to Dinah Miller, a great-great-great grandmother, who according to folklore and family history, was one of the first slaves to have arrived in the Bend. Gee’s Bend is a small rural community nestled into a curve in the Alabama River southwest of Selma, Alabama. Founded in antebellum times, it was the site of cotton plantations, primarily the lands of Joseph Gee and his relative Mark Pettway, who bought the Gee estate in 1850. After the Civil War, the freed slaves took the name, Pettway, became tenant farmers for the Pettway family, and founded an all-black community nearly isolated from the surrounding world. Loretta’s quilts are in the collections of The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. She is a recipient of a 2015 National Heritage Fellowship awarded by the National Endowment for the Arts, which is the United States government’s highest honor in the folk and traditional arts.

July 26  Stuart Loch  
Our Place in the Universe: Looking up  

There is a wealth of information about our place in the Universe that can be gained by carefully looking up. Dr. Stuart Loch will give an overview of the Universe, starting locally with our solar system and moving out to objects that are billions of light-years away. All these objects can be seen either by eye, using binoculars, or relatively simple telescopes. In each case, I will show how you can observe these objects on your own. The photographs in the talk are all taken from the Auburn Astronomy Terrace telescopes or from back-yard observers who live locally. The aim of the talk is to capture some of the awe experienced by looking up into the night sky.

Dr. Stuart Loch is a Professor in the Physics Department at Auburn University. His research is in the area of Laboratory Astrophysics and involves analyzing the light that is given off from astrophysical objects. He is also involved in the Auburn Astronomy Terrace, a set of telescopes on the roof of the Auburn Physics building. His Ph.D. was from the University of Strathclyde in Scotland. He moved to Auburn in 2002 as a post-doctoral researcher, becoming faculty in 2006. His research is funded by NASA, NSF, and DOE. He is an Alumni Professor at Auburn and in 2014 was awarded the Gerald and Emily Leischuck endowed Presidential Award for excellence in Teaching by the University.