Moon craters named for UCSD kin by NASA

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Two craters on the far side of the moon have been named in honor of relatives of two UCSD faculty members, according to information just received here from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

A newly released NASA lunar chart designates the craters as "Szilard" and "Arrhenius." They were named for Dr. Leo Szilard, late husband of Dr. Gertrud Weiss Szilard, of the UCSD School of Medicine faculty, and Dr. Svante August Arrhenius, grandfather of Dr. Gustaf Arrhenius, professor of oceanography at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

Szilard and Arrhenius were among 513 world-renowned figures whose names were confirmed recently by the International Astronomical Union at the Union's 14th general assembly in Brighton, England. Recipients of the crater-naming honor ranged from such classical figures as Omar Khayyam, Hippocrates and Chaucer to such contemporary heroes as the Apollo 11 astronauts.

The crater named for Szilard, a nuclear physicist generally credited with conceiving the idea of nuclear chain reaction, lies near others honoring British author H. G. Wells, French nuclear physicist F. Joliot Curie, and several Russian scientists.

The crater named for Arrhenius, a Swedish chemist who won the Nobel Prize in 1903, is located in the south polar region of the moon.

Mrs. Szilard, who resides in La Jolla, learned of the honor bestowed on her late husband through a letter from Dr. Donald H. Menzel, former director of the Harvard Observatory and chairman of the IAU's nomenclature group.

"It is a beautiful crater, about 75 miles in diameter," he wrote Mrs. Szilard, "and I am sure that Leo would himself have been proud of it. You can see that astronomers as well as his own colleagues regard him very highly."

Mrs. Szilard said her husband must have had a premonition that a crater would be named tor him one day, even though his work was not related directly to space science.

"Four years before his death in La Jolla in 1964," she said, "he wrote a book of short stories called 'The Voice of the Dolphins.' These stories, written with a light touch but with an underlying tone of great seriousness, predicted many of the grave events which now have come to pass in the world. In a humorous footnote, he predicted that Russian scientists would honor him posthumously by naming a crater on the moon's far side after him. And now, the decision of an international organization representing many nations, including Russia, has made his prediction a reality."

Mrs. Szilard, who holds a master's degree in public health from Columbia and and M.D. from the University of Vienna, moved to La Jolla with her late husband early in 1964. Her husband, she explained, came here to join the Salk Institute as a resident fellow after his retirement from the University of Chicago faculty.

Mrs. Szilard, on the faculty of the UCSD Department of Community Medicine, is editing her husband's papers, now housed in the UCSD library.

The late Dr. Szilard conceived the idea of nuclear chain reaction in 1934 while in England. There he foresaw the possible application of this idea to nuclear weapons. He patented his first concept, but kept it secret. In 1938 he came to the United States, where he and another Hungarian refugee, Eugene Paul Wigner, persuaded Albert Einstein to write the now historic letter to President Franklin Roosevelt which set in motion the Manhattan Project and led to development of the first nuclear bomb. Szilard, aware that Adolf Hitler's scientists also were working on a nuclear weapon, realized that the race for atomic weaponry would have to be won by the Allies.

Once the bomb was ready, however, Szilard joined many U.S. scientists in urging that the new weapon not be used. He became a U.S. citizen in 1943, and worked the last two decades of his life at the University of Chicago, choosing to abandon nuclear physics for a new career in molecular biology. He received the Atoms for Peace award in 1959.

Arrhenius, grandfather of Prof. Arrhenius of UCSD, was highly regarded throughout the world for his achievements in chemical physics. His most famous discovery, the theory of electrolytic dissociation, is known today as "Arrhenius' theory." Throughout his lifetime, the Swedish physicist was interested in the structure of the universe, and was one of the first scientists to formulate certain advanced concepts in cosmic physics. He died in Stockholm in 1927.