

Friends of the Observatory

Issue #4 June 2013

Summer solstice

Thank you

Since the last solstice newsletter there have been sixteen donations. Thank you for your contributions toward the restoration of the telescope.

Illinois Homecoming 2013

There will be a private gathering at the Observatory for Friends and members of the Astronomical Society to socialize and observe starting at 7 pm on Friday, October 25th after the pep rally. A public open house will begin at 8:00 pm. Hope you can attend!

How to Contribute

Your support has contributed to the preservation of the Observatory and the telescope. Your continued assistance is needed. Gifts can be made through the Illinois Foundation. To learn how to contribute, please visit the web site below for details:

observatory.astro.illinois.edu/friends/donate/



Restoration begins

Something was in the air on May 22nd, and it was the telescope! The telescope was disassembled and transported to Swarthmore Pa. for restoration by Ray Museum Studios. All that remains on campus is the pier and the objective (now cleaned and safely stored under lock and key). Funding for the ~\$50K was courtesy of donations from Friends like you and the Chancellor's Fund. Repairs include correcting clock drive wobble and a frozen lock gear. The telescope will be restored to its late 19th century look but also updated with LED lights, a sidereal clock, and data ports. The telescope should return in late August.

(Continued)



Above: Mechanical engineering professor emeritus Fred Orthlieb and Swarthmore students Sergio Rosas and Yousef Alhessi work on disassembly of the declination and polar axis.

All photos by L. Brian Stauffer, Public Affairs.





Astronomy National Historic Landmarks

Old Naval Observatory
Washington DC, 1964

Lowell Observatory
Arizona, 1965

Edwin Hubble House
California, 1976

Hale Solar Laboratory
California, 1989

Lick Observatory Building
California, 1989

Lick Crossley 36-in reflector
California, 1989

Mount Wilson Observatory
California, 1989

Palomar Observatory, 200-in
California, 1989

Palomar 48-in Schmidt telescope
California, 1989

US Naval Observatory
Washington DC, 1989

Gaithersburg Latitude Observatory
Maryland, 1989

Horn Antenna, Bells Labs
New Jersey, 1989

Cincinnati Observatory
Ohio, 1989

Allegheny Observatory
Pennsylvania, 1989

Stellafane Observatory
Vermont, 1989

Reber Radio Telescope
West Virginia, 1989

University of Illinois Observatory
Illinois, 1989

Vassar College Observatory
New York, 1991

Yerkes Observatory
Wisconsin, 1989

Adler Planetarium*
Illinois, 1987

*Education facility

Hello Dave . . .

In Arthur C. Clarke's classic science fiction novel and Stanley Kubrick's movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*, HAL 9000 was one of the main characters. As many of you know, HAL (**H**euristically program **A**lgorithmic computer) became operational in Urbana on January 12th, 1997 (according to the book). Why did Arthur C. Clarke select Urbana as HAL's birthplace?

Clarke said "The reason I chose to put him at the University of Illinois-Urbana was that my old math professor was a professor there, George McVittie. He had been my math professor at King's College, London, and he became the professor of astronomy at Urbana, and that was a tribute to him" ("Happy Birthday, Hal", January 9, 1992, *Chicago Tribune*).

Professor McVittie (1904-1988) was a renowned cosmologist and the chair of the Astronomy Department between 1952 and 1972. During his tenure he directed the expansion of the department including the construction of the Vermillion Radio Observatory and the Prairie Observatory. The telescope was last restored and the Observatory expanded twice under his leadership.

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Our Neighbor

Morrow Plots

Morrow Plots is well known on campus as a National Landmark and the oldest continuous agricultural research fields in the United States. Established in 1876, the original plots consisted of 10 half-acre plots. Today only three remain.

The northern most 2 plots were lost to the construction of the Observatory, and not without notice. Since “the selection of the site for a new astronomical observatory created a minor furor among agriculture staff members. . . Mr. C. C. Chapman actually plowed these two plots in the spring of 1896, and he recalled the dissension between those who built the observatory and the Agricultural Station personnel who used plots 1 and 2.” The loss of those two plots led the agricultural staff to recognize the need to protect the plots and identify them as long-term permanent experimental fields.

Morrow Plots was declared a National Landmark in 1968. Although the cappella group *The Other Guys* does not have a song about the Observatory, the 2 landmarks have benefited from each other. For the Observatory there are no obstructions of the sky from the construction of a large building directly south. Consider that none of the campus master plans from the early 20th century include Morrow Plots or the Observatory and the land was seriously considered as the site of the Armory. The open sky and green space also captures the setting of the earliest days of the Observatory.

As University president Stanley Ikenberry noted in his August 15, 1989 letter of support to the National Park Service; “It has been noted, too, that the juxtaposition of the Observatory and Morrow Plots, also a National Historic Landmark, make a strong statement about the significant contributions made in scientific and agricultural research at the University of Illinois.” Earth and sky unite on the south Quad.

In the News

The beginning of the telescope’s restoration has caught the attention of the campus. The **News Gazette** <http://www.news-gazette.com/> featured a front page story on May 22nd and footage of the lift made the evening news on WCIA <http://illinoishomepage.net/>. The telescope removal was a big hit on Facebook with the University, LAS, Facilities Services, and the Alumni Association all featuring stories. Hundreds “liked” the news and dozens left comments supporting the effort. You can continue to follow the renovation on both the Friends’ Facebook page or the Friends’ website.

Some comments from Facebook on the telescopes renovation:

- I still remember the first time I went inside the observatory with an astronomy class to see sunspots!
- I look through that thing once at Sirius A and B. It was awesome.
- I stopped quite often at this location to look at the sky and stars. I have fun memories at this place.
- Of that is the telescope I am thinking of, I first saw Saturn through that telescope in spring 1964 as a sixth grader on a class trip to the old observatory.
- That’s where I saw Saturn for the first time during the first week on campus!
- Our baby is gone. To take a nice bath so to speak. Can’t wait to see her at homecoming all fresh n clean.
- esta buenazo

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<https://www.facebook.com/U.of.Illinois.Observatory> or

<http://observatory.astro.illinois.edu/>