Return to "Starlight Nights"

TIME CAPSULES *with Leslie C. Peltier*

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This Historical Preservation Project has been produced with the generosity and help of individuals who wish to keep alive the memory of one of astronomy's amateur pioneers. Bringing some of the best of our past to help make the best of our future. . .

Presented as TIME CAPSULES, the following will highlight photos that have been assembled with narrative. Images used with permission.

This project is purely for historical preservation and no money will be received for its production or distribution.

TIME CAPSULES *with Leslie C. Peltier*

"Introduction" by Vinny Strosnider

Mercury and the Moon during an Ohio harvest sunrise

"Starlight Nights" for me is the story of a country boy and his surroundings, much like my own. Nature, discovery and simple delights were the refuge of his rural escape during a time when the only entertainment available was his own imagination.

Being raised in the country and exploring whatever was over the next hill is my connection to Leslie Peltier.

The work ethic of country living, values of family life, small town community and national pride were deeply woven into his America and resurfaced in his writing.

Leslie's story continues to resonate into the future for the simple fact that it speaks to what use to be everyday life in the heartland of America and the free world.

As with many of you who have read *"Starlight Nights,"* I too had wondered about the people, places and especially Leslie's telescopes that were described so well.

Growing up and living only a few hours from Leslie's home town, I thought that I would take a ride as others have done before me to visit "The Place on Jennings Creek." To see for myself what was left. One thing led to another and after three years of working on this "cloudy night's project," I have answered all my questions and maybe some of yours as well.

"Return to Starlight Nights" is my answer to those questions. A project that I have truly enjoyed. More of a history detective than astronomer, I have enjoyed the people in astronomy more than I have the stars. In truthfulness, I use to think there was nothing more boring than watching golf on TV, that is until I heard about variable star observing. But, I am learning that though stars basically look the same with my eyes, there are some "pretty amazing" things going on up there in my own backyard telescope.

"Return to Starlight Nights" is purely an historical snapshot of some of the places and experiences Leslie wrote of. It is designed for preservation and the education of our future "high tech" stargazers of what old fashioned stargazing and backyard astronomers were like.

The following are TIME CAPSULES that many people have helped produce by sharing their photos and memories of Leslie. This project is for those of you who are fans of *"Starlight Nights."* Those of you, like me, who wish you could go back in time and be with the people.

I hope you enjoy your *"Return to Starlight Nights."* *Vinny Strosnider December 31, 2016* Ω

FORWARD

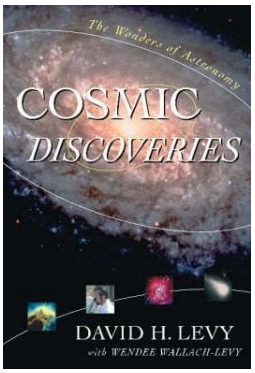
"David and Wendee Levy"

Of all mankind that has ever lived on this planet, the astronomer is the most unique and discerning in their view of the world.

Consider this, it is the astronomer that understands that while the rest of us sit in front of our TVs, lay in our beds sleeping or travel to work, that we live on the most perfect spaceship that has ever existed. Everything a person could need is found on this spaceship as we travel through cold space at 65,000 miles an hour.

Though it can't be felt, we travel around the circumference of a star we all call the Sun, hanging in mid-space, by an unseen force so precise that we set our digital electronics to it.

David and Wendee Levy are two such understanding astronomers. Wendee, a longtime advocate in serving the future, by educating and shaping our youth and David, in his life long quest to experience and share with us the universe that surrounds us.



Both are found in the annuls of Who's Who and both genuinely care for our environment. To google their names means you're going to be reading for a while.

The annual Adirondack Retreat that Wendee and David have hosted over the last decade has been one of those labors of love that, I'm sure despite the hard work involved, has only served to better the lives of those who have attended. Six-hundred acres of wildlife, dark skies, beautiful stars and sunny good-times.

A place like this must be what it was like when mankind first began to watch the heavens and dream.

I contacted David and asked if he would be willing to share any of his Leslie Peltier stories with us. I had not heard of David before reading the forward to *"Starlight Nights."* Obviously new to astronomy and only having read Leslie's book, I was under the impression that Leslie was the most "famous" amateur astronomer in the world, but I have since learned that there are others. It's just that they don't go around tooting their own horns, just their telescopes.

Now let us travel back in time and space as stories are relived in this TIME CAPSULE *with Leslie C. Peltier, …* "*Starlight Nights*" and the memories of David H. Levy. Ω

Dr. David H. Levy remembers…

Leslie Copus Peltier

David and a future astronomer in David's backyard observatory David H. Levy Jarnac Observatory Vail, Arizona

…If you're an avid stargazer as I am, then nothing gets your juices flowing more than the site of the Sun setting in the west with the promise of a dark, crystal clear night. And that's precisely how "*Starlight Nights: The Adventure of a Star Gazer"* - Leslie C. Peltier's magnum opus - begins.

I love the opening lines of the book, and each year, when I lectured to a group attending astronomy camp, I began with the words…

There's a chill in the autumn air as I walk down the path that leads along the brow of the hill, past the garden and the big lilac, to the clearing just beyond. Already, in the gathering dusk, a few of the stars are turning on their lights. Vega, the brightest one, is now dropping toward the west. Can it be that half a year has gone by since I watched her April rising in the east?

The quiet strength of Peltier's words filled the cavernous dome as I threw a switch and the huge shutters begin to slide apart, revealing a darkening sky. Ω

University of Arizona Astronomy Camp

Jarnac (roll off roof) Observatory Vail, Arizona David with all his nighttime friends Photo taken by Wendee Levy

Leslie Copus Peltier, who was born January 2, 1900 and died May 10, 1980 in Delphos, Ohio, was already a famous stargazer decades before Starlight Nights first appeared in late 1965.

Leslie saved $18.00 to buy his first telescope – a 2-inch brass refractor – by picking 900 quarts of strawberries in his family farm at 2 cents per quart. In 1918 he joined the American Association of Variable Star Observers, then a fledgling organization.

David with his travel scope
Photo courtesy of George Ruge

On November 13, 1925, he discovered the first of his dozen comets, and later in 1936, when his brightest one glided gracefully across the sky, he was arguably the most famous amateur astronomer in the western hemisphere. By the time I began looking skyward in 1960, Leslie had become more involved with monitoring his beloved variable stars.

Comet Ikeya-Seki 1965 over Buenos Aries
Third brightest comet recorded (-10.0)

A few weeks after the appearance of Ikeya-Seki, the great comet of 1965, "*Starlight Nights"* was published.

Near the end of 1965, Isabel Williamson introduced me to a new book that the Library of the Montreal Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada had just purchased, a copy of the first edition of "*Starlight Nights: The Adventures of a Star Gazer."*

Having to do a book report in 11th Grade, I asked permission from Mrs. Lancey, my English teacher, to read "*Starlight Nights*."

What a score for high school. I wrote in my journal that evening… "I got to read an astronomy book and write about it for English class." I wasted no time getting started. Ω

That very evening I sat up in bed and started reading and couldn't put it down. It was absolutely mesmerizing, this autobiography of a man whose lifelong passion was the night sky, it's variable stars, and wandering comets. It had a profound impact on me and remains the most interesting book I have ever read.

Many chapters later and well into the night, I was still unable to turn out the lights. To say the book captivated me is to profoundly understate its impact on my life.

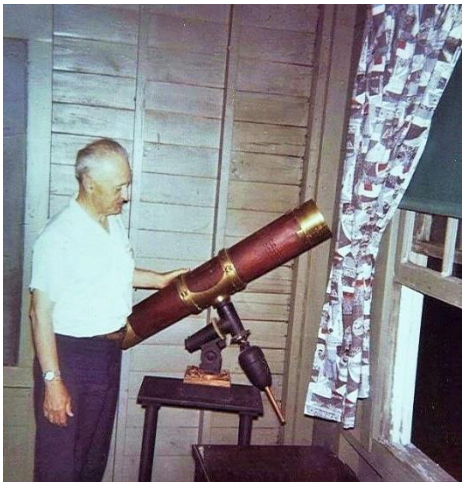
NGC 6946 galaxy by Wendee Levy and Adam Block at Kitt Peak

Die-hard observers should lend the book to their families, as I did to my father. One of the most powerful memories of Leslie concerns my Father, who was even more an avid reader than I am.

"I never fully understood or appreciated your passion for the sky" Dad said, "until I read this book"

Several months after I finished reading "*Starlight Nights"* I resolved that I would write to Leslie. Two weeks later my spirits soared when I received an envelope with a Delphos, Ohio postmark. Inside was a letter from Leslie, thanking me for my kind words about *"Starlight Nights"*

I wrote Leslie at the end of 1966 and his response began a long period of correspondence that culminated in my first meeting with him in 1974, followed by a second one in 1979 a few months before he passed away.



Leslie with his mahogany tube Comet Seeker

It was during my second visit to Leslie's house that I realized how much Leslie's books and telescopes were a part of him. He took me into a corner of his observatory, and there sat the old mahogany tube that in an earlier time had held the lenses of his 6-inch comet-seeker telescope. There, written in deep, proud letters that almost encircled the little tube, were the designations of the twelve Peltier comets whose light had passed through that telescope before any other. In hand-cut numbers and letters was the core of an inspiring career.

Fifteen times this little telescope had uncovered a new member of our solar system. And the unassuming person standing next to it was responsible for twelve of them.

Leslie at the Comet Seeker

The strawberry spyglass was the only telescope Leslie ever had to buy, His next two instruments, 6- and 12-inch refractors, were essentially given to him.

Leslie used the 12-inch mostly to observe variable stars. But the 6-inch was for comet hunting, and he was delighted to learn that Zaccheus Daniel of Princeton University had used it to discover three comets. Ω

David "interviews" astronaut Story Musgrave

My comet hunting career began on December 17th, 1965 and among *"Starlight Nights"* wide variety of observing experiences, those about his comet discoveries inspired me the most. When I first met Leslie in 1974, I wanted him to share his comet discoveries with me. But he was a quiet and modest man, eager to discuss observing in general but not the stories of his own success. That would be the job of others to tell.

Leslie traveled rarely; a socialite he was not. One time, however, Peltier did go to California to accept the Bruce Blair Medal, offered by the Western Amateur Astronomers for outstanding achievement. Walter Scott Houston recalls how one person there asked Leslie why he took the train to California. *"Because"* Leslie answered seriously, *"the stagecoach no longer operates."*

My second visit took place a few months before his death. By this time, I was much more serious about comet hunting and he far more reminiscent. We also spent much time discussing *"Starlight Nights."* It was his proudest achievement in writing. There are too many books on theoretical astronomy, he told me, and not enough about the passion of a clear night that can come only from someone who has experienced it firsthand.

I have a special copy of *"Starlight Nights,"* a rebound second edition with extra pages in front. Like a lucky rabbit's foot, I would carry it with me whenever I gave a talk or lecture and would quote extensively from it. The date and subject of the talk subsequently would get recorded in the blank front pages. I have quoted from it nearly 150 times, because it so successfully captures the mood, intensity, and fun of the amateur spirit. If your parent, spouse, child or friend asks why are you so committed to amateur astronomy, have them read this book.

Leslie's reputation is based on three things. Of prime importance is his record of discovery; between 1925 and 1954 he found twelve new comets and four exploding stars, or novae.

Less spectacular but every bit as important is Leslie's careful measuring of variable stars over a span of sixty-two years. The 132,000 observations he made provide a record of how these strange stars change their brightness over days, months, and even years. Because he kept watch so carefully, our understanding of these stars is better.

A third area is his writings. They represent his most significant contribution to astronomy because they don't just point out the stars, they point out a way of enjoying them.

On May10th, 1980 Leslie died suddenly as he was preparing his telescopes for a spring night of observing. He never had his much-longed-for second view of Halley's Comet, and I never got to share with him the details of my first comet discovery on November 13th, 1984 – 59 years to the day after his own first comet find.

David now shares with us the details of discovering his "first comet" 19 years after beginning to search

As I sat in the Peltier living room on my first visit in April 1974, I realized then, just as Scotty Houston had said years earlier, the real Leslie was identical to the star of *"Starlight Nights."*

-David H. Levy Jarnac Observatory Ω

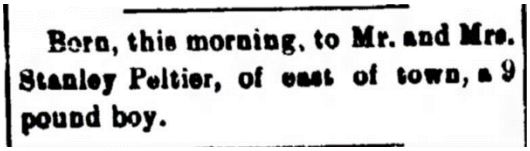
TIME CAPSULES *with Leslie C. Peltier*

"The Strawberry Spyglass" by Vinny Strosnider

...from farm boy to legend

What causes a person to become a legend or a book to become a classic? Simply a person with a good story to tell and a good storyteller to do the telling, along with future generations who "keep on tellin' it."

Born January 2nd, 1900, Leslie Peltier is one of those legends.

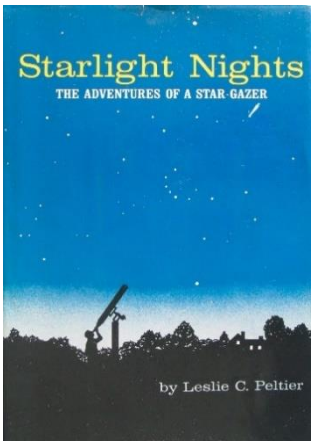

Born, this morning, to Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Peltier, of east of town, a 9 pound boy.

By simply writing the story of his life on the farm, his love for nature and his time with the stars, Leslie has managed to capture a snapshot of a long-lost era and the imaginations of so many of those who have read it. His story of adventure, now a heritage classic, is entitled "*Starlight Nights the Adventures of a Star Gazer*." First printed in the U.S in 1965 and then reprinted again in 1967 in the U.K.

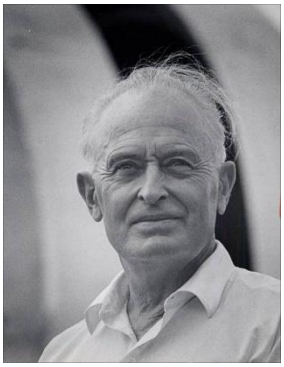
Leslie shared with us his life's story in 1965 beginning with his boyhood life on the family farm and then his adult life four miles away in the town of Delphos, Ohio.

After reading Leslie's story in the winter of 1966, David H. Levy, now a well-known astronomer and comet hunter of our time, has shared his friendship with Leslie and the story of their encounters throughout his writing career with fellow stargazers and future astronomers.

After reading Leslie's story in 1990, Major Roger Hoffman rescued Leslie's last remaining observatory in 1992, the Merry-Go-Round observatory, and restored it for us to enjoy today. Now located at John Bryan State Park Observatory courtesy of the Miami Valley Astronomical Society Dayton, Ohio.



1965 Harper & Row Publishing


Leslie Peltier

During the last 20 years of Leslie's life and at the time of Leslie writing his autobiography, Don and Carolyn Hurless shared a passion for the sky with Leslie also protecting valuable photos and star charts that Leslie had given them. It wouldn't be until 50 years later these reminders would resurface again.

And now after reading Leslie's story, future generations since Leslie's passing are continuing to share the legacy these individuals have passed on to us. Stories of life before technology, indoor plumbing, refrigeration, airplanes and electricity. Leslie Peltier's story begins on the Peltier family strawberry farm in the year 1900 located only four miles away from "America's Friendliest City." Ω

…America's Friendliest City

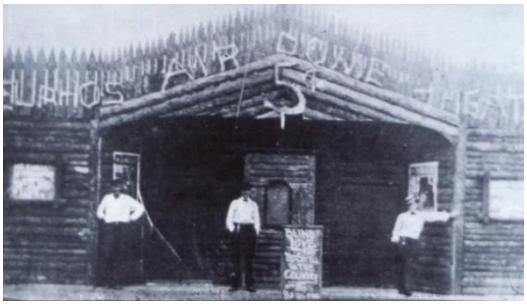
Once a mosquito infested swamp during the time of Tecumseh, the land that Delphos, Ohio and its pioneers later inhabited became the honey center of the state surrounded by extensive fields of clover. Later due to the desire for trade and commerce expansion, a manmade canal was dug through the center of Delphos connecting it to major transport sources of the state, thereby creating a greater number of products transported. Canal towns, as with river towns, grew at a much faster rate than land locked communities.

Water canals served the purpose of transporting goods until the railroad had come into its own. It was the canals that transported the machined parts for the trains and their metal tracks that would put the canals out of business. The canals were left to dry up and most were filled in.

There are still remnants of these old canals and locks within parks and museums throughout Ohio preserved as historical landmarks.

Once the Railroad began transporting goods and products, communities grew at an even faster rate. A life of survival could now include life with entertainment.

By the time Leslie was a young boy and going to town on Saturday afternoons by horse and wagon with his family, Leslie had the choice of three motion picture theaters he could attend. One theater he mentions was what he called an "outdoor, fair-weather establishment."



ca.1907 The Delphos Air Dome Theater 5 cents
Delphos Canal Museum

Charley Rays Delphos Canal Museum

By the end of the evening Leslie's family would meet back at Charley Ray's grocery store, who as a steady strawberry customer would sell Peltier Strawberries to the town people.

Then Memorial Day of 1909 the first "aero-plane" visits Delphos, Ohio. Described in detail by Leslie was the "Curtiss Biplane" along with its pilot Bud Mars also known as the Curtiss Daredevil. Ω

Bud and Mrs. Mars flying the Curtiss Biplane

…blessed are those raised on a farm

In 1849 Leslie's great grandfather was deeded land for his help in clearing the wooded areas to make way for a new farming community. Leslie's family settled on about 50 acres and began raising crops, livestock and kids.

The Peltier farm as it looks today
Compare this photo with Leslie's sketch in "Starlight Nights."

Much different than city life yet much preferred by those who enjoyed the freedom of wide open spaces. Farm life not only provided food for those living in cities, but also provided self-sufficient living for those willing to work from morning till night. Back then the farmer was recognized for his contribution of feeding meat, fruits and vegetables to the rest of the nation.

Delphos Canal Museum

General William Tecumseh Sherman

During the time of the Civil War farmers contributed by feeding the men fighting the war. Leslie's grandfather fought for the Northern Army following General William Tecumseh Sherman, who famously marched his way into Georgia.

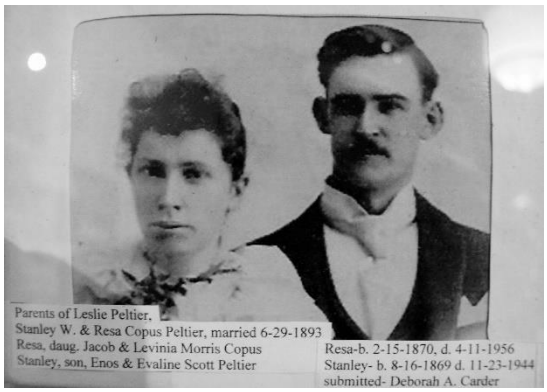
During Leslie's young life World War One had begun in Europe and Leslie would have to leave school due to his older brother Kenneth being with a unit of heavy artillery somewhere in France. Spring work was starting on the farm and it was best that Leslie replace him at home for the duration then go back later and finish high school. To this Leslie voiced no objection as he states "for I was young and youth always welcomes change."

Leslie also describes a boyhood adventure with a friend by way of the Peltier family's Model-T Ford to the "Copus Hill Monument" memorializing the Indian massacre of James Copus and three solders on the morning of September 10, 1812.

1882 The Copus Hill Monument erected 70 years after the event

2015 The Copus Hill Monument still standing secluded on an old gravel road 103 years after the event and inscribed with the names of James Copus, Three Soldiers and Johnny Appleseed

Erected on the location of the former James Copus cabin in 1882, Leslie visited the monument in 1919 where his great, great grandfather James Copus was mortally wounded by Indian attack 107 years earlier. Ω

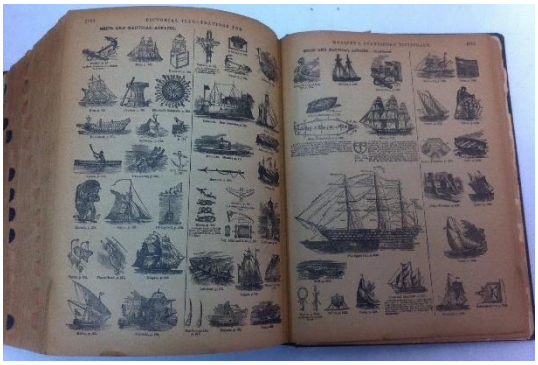


Resa (Copus) Peltier and Stanley Peltier Wedding Day 1893 Delphos Canal Museum

…educated and artistic farmers

Leslie's mother, heir to the Copus name, was a school teacher some years before raising a family of her own. Leslie would inherit her quiet personality and remarkable memory. From her daily guidance, Leslie was well read in many different genres of literature. Classical, poetry, humanities, and science. Leslie also enjoyed entering spelling bees or spelling downs as they were then called. Not only did Leslie learn how to spell from an 1885 Webster's Unabridged Dictionary that was his mothers, but he also became enamored with the many illustrations.

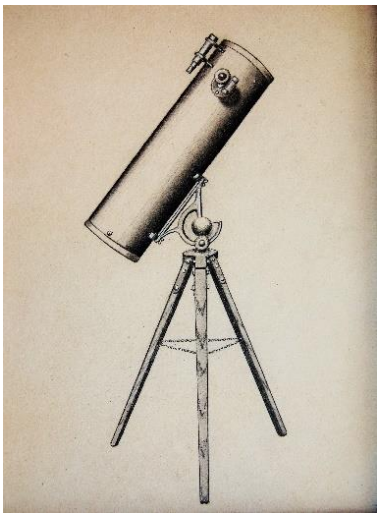
Leslie's dad, born into a farming family, grew up with his family just across the road from Leslie's birthplace. Apart from farming and building, Stanley Peltier would draw and paint. Often in his younger days framing and mounting his artwork on the farmhouse walls.



… "and sailing ships from every sea" Starlight Nights

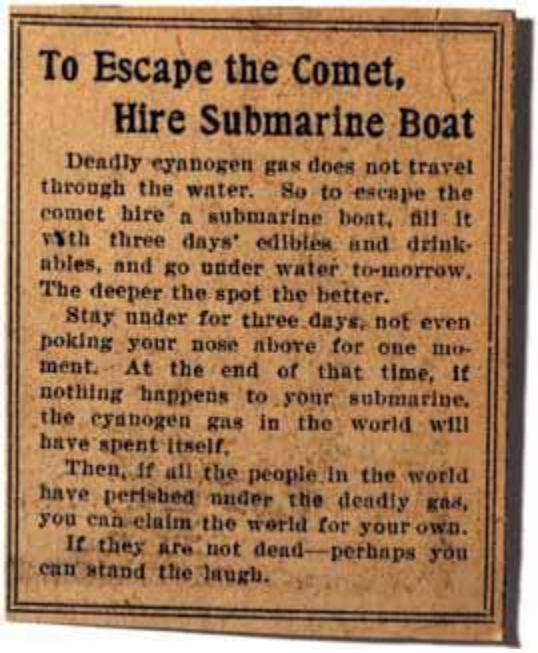
Painting by Stanley Peltier 1891 Delphos Canal Museum

From his father, Leslie would inherit creative ingenuity and artistic talent that would serve him in his employment as a sketch artist, illustrator and designer the entire rest of his life. Ω



Leslie's sketch of an 8-inch reflector telescope hand built by Carolyn Hurless

Leslie Peltier designer and illustrator of children's furniture Delphos Bending Co.



To Escape the Comet, Hire Submarine Boat

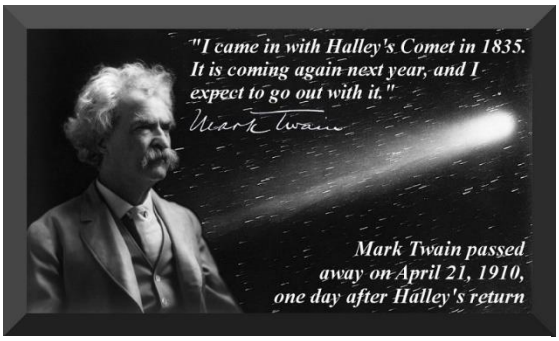
Deadly cyanogen gas does not travel through the water. So to escape the comet hire a submarine boat, fill it with three days' edibles and drinkables, and go under water to-morrow. The deeper the spot the better.

Stay under for three days, not even poking your nose above for one moment. At the end of that time, if nothing happens to your submarine, the cyanogen gas in the world will have spent itself.

Then, if all the people in the world have perished under the deadly gas, you can claim the world for your own.

If they are not dead—perhaps you can stand the laugh.

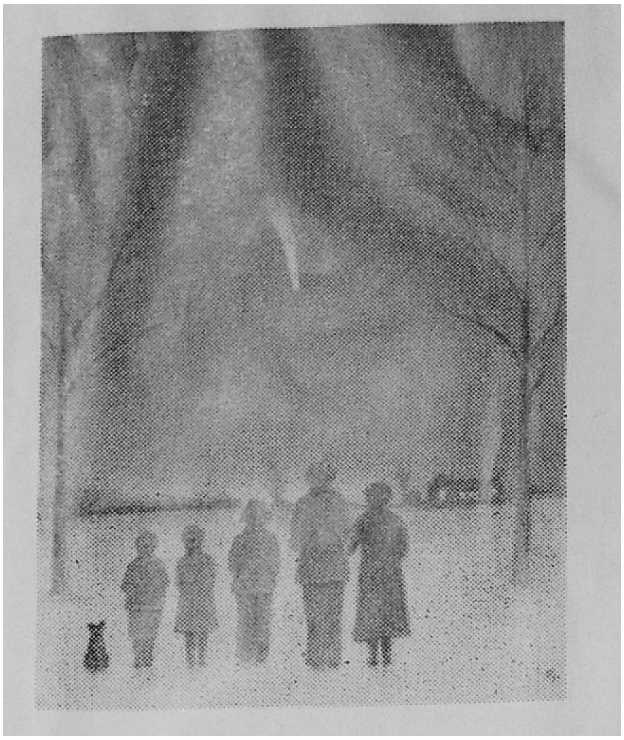
The superstitious however, including one celebrity, foresaw their demise.



Mark Twain believed enough that it happened

…is that a shooting star?

1910 brought about the spectacle of Halley's Comet. Reported in many magazines and newspapers prior to its arrival by the educated and naysayers alike. Depending on who you listened to, your reaction followed suit. Leslie and his family simply watched from the farm enjoying the daytime and nighttime display.



Leslie's sketch used in the publisher's 1965 book catalog of he and his family watching Halley's Comet of 1910

…can I see the eclipse?

Leslie also tells of the Great Solar Eclipse of 1918. What made this different was that it was a total solar eclipse that would take place along a narrow pathway the entire length of the United States. Another "Total Solar Eclipse" spanning the entire nation like this would not happen again for some time. Leslie could only see a partial eclipse from the farm.


DENVER POST—FIRST IN EVERYTHING

THOUSANDS POINT GLASSES AT SUN TO WATCH ECLIPSE

MAP SHOWING PATH of TOTAL ECLIPSE of the SUN ACROSS the UNITED STATES, JUNE 8, 1918.

Police Enforce Quiet So Astronomers at University May Make Priceless Observations—Movies to Be Taken—Throngs Seek Vantage Points.

AMERICANS PUSH GERMANS BACK IN

Ten years before, while in school, Leslie's would see his first solar eclipse. His teacher brought in broken pieces of clear, flat glass to hold over the oil lamps. The soot from the burning oil darkened the glass enough to view a partial eclipse of the sun without supposed harm to their eyes. Ω

A Delphos farmer mowing straw Delphos Canal Museum

…what are we planting this year?

Leslie mentions a day he was out in the field with the old cultivator and the team of horses he drove to pull it. That year the land could have grown hay or straw or been pasture for the cows. Afterwards it may have been planted in corn. The farmer must strategize concerning what crops or livestock he wants to invest in. Local buying markets and their payout prices helped the crop farmer decide which crops to go with.

Strawberries were one choice for land use during Leslie's early years on the farm. The senior locals of Delphos still remember the strawberries from the Peltier farm when they were young. Both Stanley Peltier and Ralph Peltier, Leslie's dad and uncle, grew strawberries on the Enos Peltier family farm, Leslie's granddad.

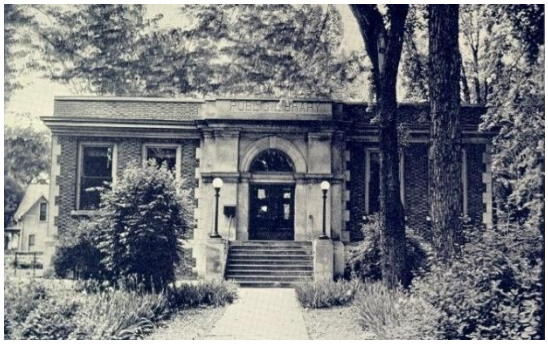
It was during his strawberry days that Leslie was taught the value of money and the hard work behind it.

Ralph Peltier strawberry crates Delphos Canal Museum

Peltier Strawberry Farm Delphos Canal Museum

Eight-year-old Leslie made his first dollar picking strawberries at one penny per quart. That's 100 quarts of hard earned back pain. That was only a trial run for what would become his first great accomplishment eight years later of 900 quarts at two-cents a quart to earn eighteen dollars.

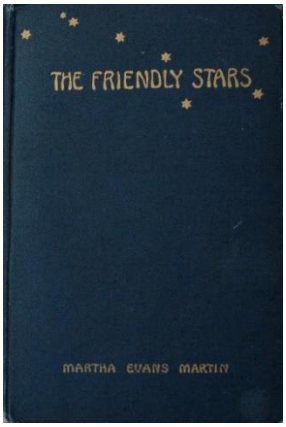
By age fifteen Leslie had noticed the night sky and wanted to learn more. On a visit to the local Delphos Public Library, Leslie asked the librarian what book was available for learning the stars. Ω

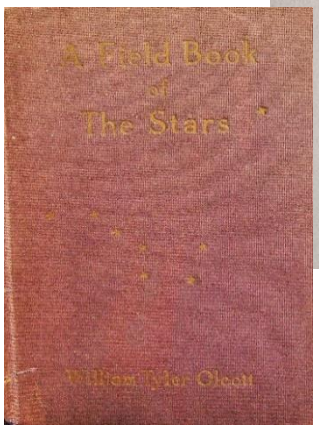


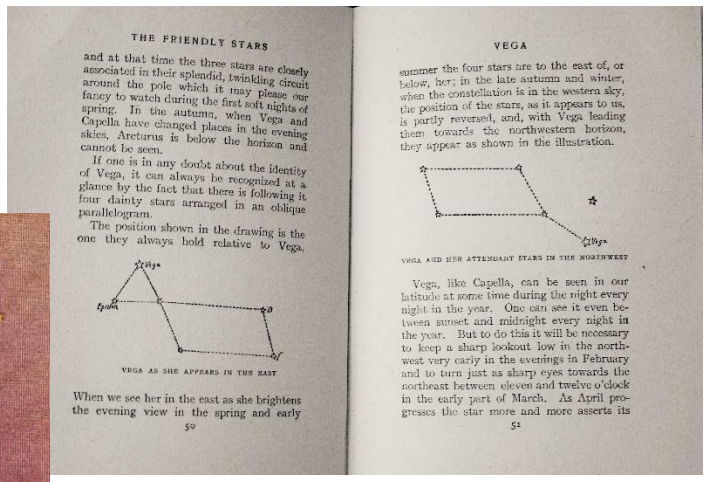
The interior and exterior of the Delphos Public Library Leslie visited

…the friendly stars

The librarian's choice? "*The Friendly Stars"* by Martha Evans Martin. This book helped Leslie get started.






THE FRIENDLY STARS

and at that time the three stars are closely associated in their splendid, twinkling circuit around the pole which it may please our fancy to watch during the first soft nights of spring. In the autumn, when Vega and Capella have changed places in the evening skies, Arcturus is below the horizon and cannot be seen.

If one is in any doubt about the identity of Vega, it can always be recognized at a glance by the fact that there is following it four dainty stars arranged in an oblique parallelogram.

The position shown in the drawing is the one they always hold relative to Vega.

VEGA AS SHE APPEARS IN THE EAST

When we see her in the east as she brightens the evening view in the spring and early

50

VEGA

summer the four stars are to the east of, or below, her; in the late autumn and winter, when the constellation is in the western sky, the position of the stars, as it appears to us, is partly reversed, and, with Vega leading them towards the northwestern horizon, they appear as shown in the illustration.

VEGA AND HER ATTENDANT STARS IN THE NORTHWEST

Vega, like Capella, can be seen in our latitude at some time during the night every night in the year. One can see it even between sunset and midnight every night in the year. But to do this it will be necessary to keep a sharp lookout low in the northwest very early in the evenings in February and to turn just as sharp eyes towards the northeast between eleven and twelve o'clock in the early part of March. As April progresses the star more and more asserts its

51

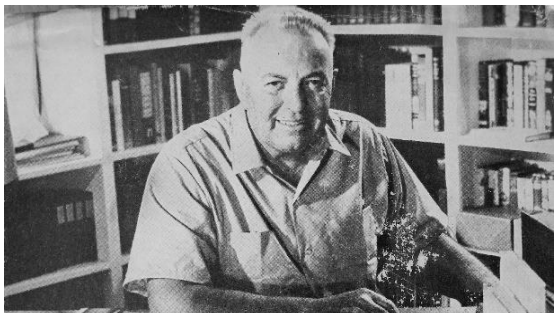
Vega was the first star Leslie set out to learn and observe using The Friendly Stars as his star map

Later, Leslie was given a copy of "*The Field Book of the Stars"* by William Tyler Olcott.

One day in 1916 Leslie was going through his latest copy of American Boy magazine. An advertisement caught his eye for a 2-inch telescope.

A S Aloe Co. Inc. St. Louis Made in France an inscription from their early scopes

Leslie describes the 2-inch scope as a 36-inch focal length with 35x and 60x magnification eyepieces. Of French manufacture with brass drawtubes, black pebbled leather cover and solar filter.



Edwin Way Teale nature writer during the 1940s and 50s encouraged Leslie to write "Starlight Nights" photo and text courtesy of the University of Connecticut

Edwin Way Teal writes of his experience with the strawberry spyglass in his book "*Autumn Across America"* "...He (Leslie) has been fascinated with the night sky since he was sixteen. That year he bought his first telescope, a thirty-power glass advertised in the American Boy. It cost eighteen dollars. We found ourselves on a common ground of experience. I picked something like 20,000 strawberries, at 2 cents a quart, to earn my first camera. Peltier, too, had picked strawberries, at the same rate of pay, to earn his first telescope. A spyglass from the A. S. Aloe Co." Ω

…the Strawberry Spyglass

Nine-hundred quarts of strawberries at two-cents a quart was picked by Leslie that June in 1916 and the telescope was his. Motivated by the dream of owning such an instrument led Leslie to accomplish his task in less than a month. The strawberry spyglass was delivered by the local mail carrier whose name happened to be Art Moon on his Excelsior single cylinder motorcycle.

Mail Carriers and their Motorcycles

Retired after four years of scientific work, the spyglass spent its retirement in fond appreciation and admiration from Leslie's friends and admirers for many years. Brought out from time to time as memories were cherished and the accomplishment relived.

1968 AAVSO meeting
Scotty visiting with Leslie in Delphos, Oh

Leslie in this 1968 color photo with his long-time friend Scotty Houston holding the 52-year-old Strawberry Spyglass.

Leslie and Scotty go back to Leslie's first meeting of the American Association of Variable Star Observers in 1932 in which Scotty threatened to hogtie and kidnap Leslie if he did not go willingly.

1932 AAVSO meeting
Leslie top row 2nd Scotty bottom row end

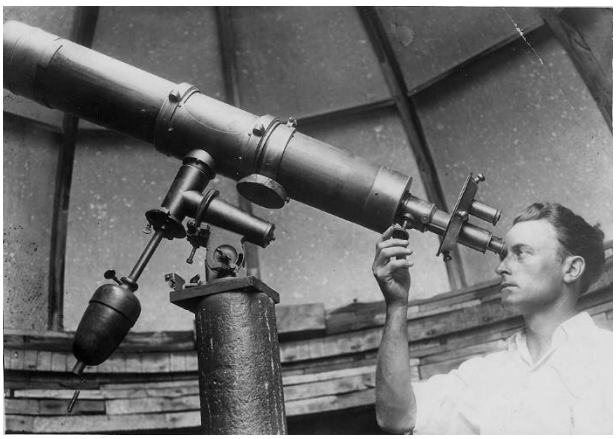
The last time the Strawberry Spyglass came out of retirement for us to view was in the year 2000 at the Delphos Public Library in which Leslie had served on the board for several years. Dottie his wife lived many years after Leslie's passing in 1980 and to celebrate the 100th year from the date of his birth on January 2, 1900, Dottie shared the famous little eighty-four-year-old spyglass along with various photos and books for many to enjoy.

The Strawberry Spyglass is safe with the Peltier family who hopefully will share it with us again one day. Ω

Mrs. Dorotha "Dottie" Peltier holds the first telescope Leslie used to star-gaze. He purchased the telescope with money he made picking strawberries when he was a sophomore in high school. He referred to it as his "Strawberry." It is part of a display at Delphos Public Library which will remain for the next two and one-half weeks honoring the 100th anniversary of his Jan. 2 birth.

TIME CAPSULES *with Leslie C. Peltier*

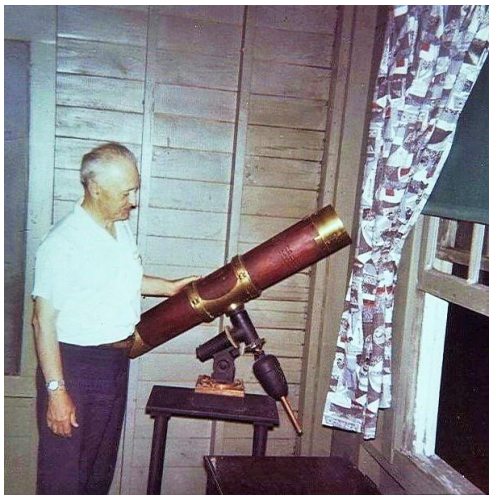
"The Comet Seeker" by Vinny Strosnider



1920s Leslie using the 6-inch Fitz Comet Seeker inside the Cow Pasture observatory Delphos Canal Museum

…a hunter of comets and stars

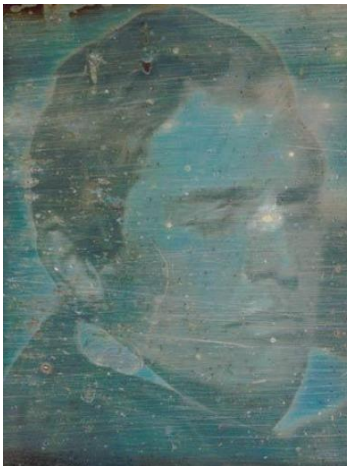
For the last fifty plus years, fans of the book "*Starlight Nights*" have read of Leslie Peltier's Comet Seeker. Considered in the 1930s a famous instrument of comet hunting, comet lore and variable stars.



1960s Leslie with the tube and mount of the 6-inch Fitz Comet Seeker displayed inside his 12-inch observatory

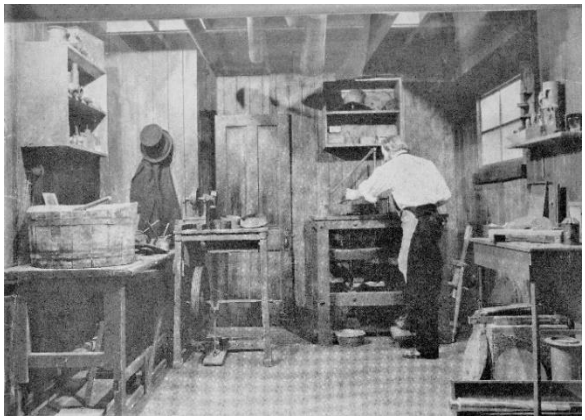
With its beautiful 1800s mahogany tube, brass hardware and Leslie's own hand carved comet dates.

Manufactured by Henry Fitz of New York City, the first telescope maker in the United States to produce the largest refractor telescopes for the public.



1839 Henry Fitz self-portrait photo National Museum of American History

At the time of writing "*Starlight Nights*," Leslie states he was unable to identify its maker.

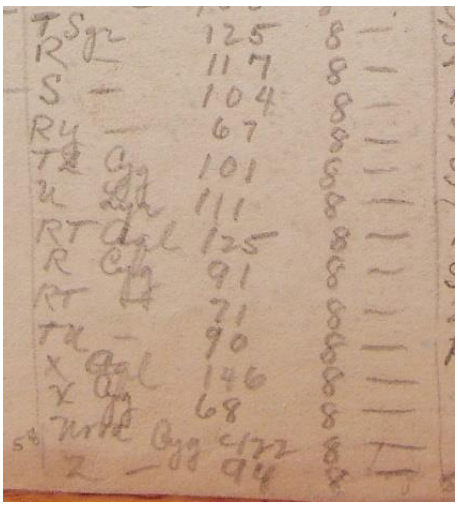


The actual workshop of Henry Fitz from the 1800s relocated to the Smithsonian, Washington DC. in the 1950s

However, after publication this was resolved. A friend of Leslie who knew the history of the 6-inch refractor states…

"…Regarding the origins of Leslie's 6" comet seeker, it was realized that the scope was in fact a Fitz through tracing its history back through its purchase by Princeton and used by Zaccheus Daniel after Leslie had completed his manuscript for "*Starlight Nights*." If you've seen the 6" in its original appearance tapered wooden tube, mount and all, there's no question this was a Fitz instrument."

…John Bortle, American Association of Variable Star Observers December 12, 2015 Ω



…from New York to New Jersey

Manufactured with a 6-inch, f:8 objective lens, the Comet Seeker could pick-up faint light down to and including 14.6 magnitude variable star observations on the best seeing nights.

As pictured to the left Leslie noted a variable star estimate down to 14.6 magnitude (on a seeing scale of 1-10) of an 8 at that moment on the night of April 30th. Year unknown but that night Leslie viewed 158 variable stars using his Merry-Go-Round observatory. Possibly Leslie's first variable star marathon on a clear night of seeing using the Comet Seeker objective in its homemade metal tube riding in the Merry-Go-Round observatory. Possibly still located on the farm that night the seeing cleared into a 9 as noted later that same night on the same chart by Leslie using his clear sky scale.

At some point after manufacture, the Comet Seeker was purchased for Halsted Observatory by Princeton University.

Directed by Henry Norris Russel from 1912 to 1947, Halsted Observatory was home to the Comet Seeker from at least 1907 to 1922. It was Dr. Russel who would offer its use to Leslie for his variable star work.

Dr. Henry Norris Russel

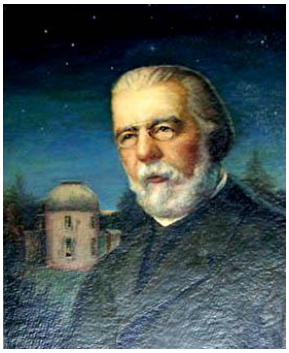
Halstead Observatory Princeton University

Zaccheus Daniel

1907 Comet Daniel

Leslie would later memorialize the Daniel Comets by hand carving their dates into the mahogany wood of the Comet Seeker. 1907, 1909-A and 1909-E. Ω

The first recorded fame of comet hunting for the Comet Seeker was June 10, 1907 when 33-year-old astronomer Zaccheus Daniel observed, from Princeton, right before morning twilight, what he suspected to be a comet. Confirmed to be such 2 days later by Dr. William Brooks of Smith Observatory Geneva, New York the famed discoverer of a record 27 comets.



Dr. W. R. Brooks
Smith Observatory N. Y.

Leslie's open air observatory with the 4-inch Mogey refractor mounted to the White Ash pier before the Cow Pasture Observatory was built in its place. The 4-inch is featured on the book jacket cover of the 1965 edition

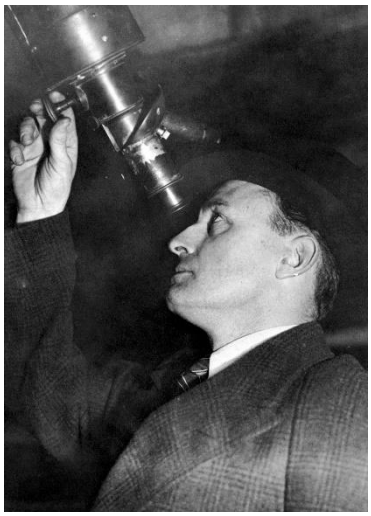
…out to pasture

By 1922, per a letter written to Leslie by Dr. Russel, the Comet Seeker was no longer being used at Halsted. No doubt hearing of Leslie's four-year accomplishments from the AAVSO with the 2-inch strawberry spyglass and then the 4-inch Mogey refractor from the AAVSO telescope loan department at Harvard, Dr. Russel offered the 6-inch Comet Seeker for Leslie's use, consequently replacing the 4-inch Mogey refractor and its White Ash, handmade pier located in the middle of a cow pasture field adjoining the Peltier farm house.

Built with the inspiration and help of Leslie's dad, the Cow Pasture observatory became the Comet Seekers new home and made famous among professional and amateur astronomers alike due to the fine astronomical precision the Fitz Comet Seeker would contribute along with Leslie's keen eye.

The Cow Pasture Observatory located in the middle of a cow pasture field housing the Princeton 6-inch Fitz Comet Seeker

The Comet Seeker was primarily used to observe variable stars on a nightly procession however, it also had the added advantage of picking up the faint fuzzy light that comets produce by scanning for the reflected light of the comet from the sun. Often scanning before sunrise and after sunset.



Leslie inside the Cow Pasture Observatory at the Fitz Comet Seeker photos courtesy of the Delphos Canal Museum Delphos, Ohio

With the Princeton graduate now mounted and balanced on its new homemade metal pipe pier inside its new homemade observatory, Leslie could use the Comet Seeker as a surgeon would their scalpel. Precisely measuring the brightness and magnitudes of distant variable stars.

A new home with a serious-minded observer, the Comet Seeker could now once again be used to its fullest advantage and bring fame to a small-town community of farmers and laymen. A fame that would one day would reach the imagination of those from other nations and eventually of those from future generations. Ω

COMET LOCATED BY OHIO OBSERVERS IS PHOTOGRAPHED

Delphos Man Calls Attention to New Comet Reported By Yerkes Observatory

Lake Geneva, Wis., Nov. 21.—Confirmation of the appearance of an entirely new comet, different from that observed a few days ago, was announced tonight by Professor Edwin B. Frost, director of Yerkes observatory of the University of Chicago here.

Professor Frost said the comet was reported on Nov. 14 by Leslie C. Peltier, an amateur observer of Delphos, Ohio, but was moving so fast that it had passed out of the location in which he reported it before a search was made for it from the observatory here.

It was observed and photographed tonight, however, by Professor Van Bresbrock and Professor E. Ross. It is moving very rapidly toward the southeast at a rate of nearly four degrees a day and is in the constellation Hercules. At six o'clock tonight its position was right ascension 17 hours and 51 minutes, declination, north 27 degrees and of the eighth magnitude.

1925 Ohio newspapers articles reporting Leslie's first newly discovered comet

…Friday the 13th

By 1925 Leslie and the Comet Seeker have spent three-years together viewing thousands of variable stars and the occasional named and documented comet passing through the northern hemisphere.

Though Leslie was primarily a variable star observer belonging to the American Association of Variable Star Observers, he aspired to one day discover an unnamed new comet.

Friday the 13th was believed by some to be an unlucky day, however for Leslie, Friday the 13th, 1925 turned out to be a very fortuitous event.

Before midnight Leslie came upon an extra spot of light that should not be where it was.

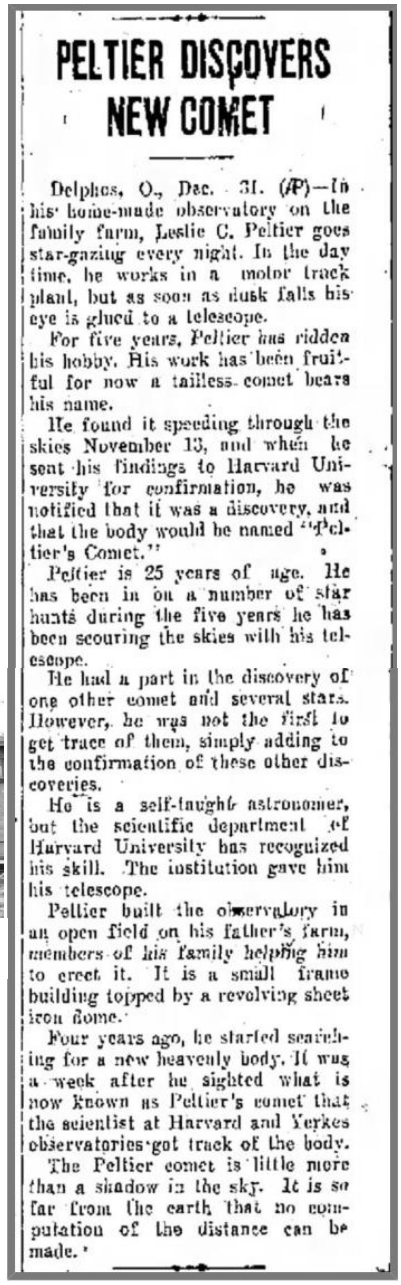
Having an excellent memory concerning his star charts and much time spent locating variable stars among various constellations, Leslie could spot anything that would be out of place within the star field of view he was accustomed to looking at.

As Leslie tells it in "*Starlight Nights*," he instantly spotted the fuzzy spec of light that was out of place. Pacing around the cow pasture and getting a drink from the pump at the water well, Leslie had to wait for the object to move within his field of view to discern it as a comet. Once detected Leslie phoned Western Union but it wasn't open that late at night. Getting his old bicycle from the barn, Leslie peddled four miles to the Pennsylvania Rail Road Depot to send off a telegram to Harvard Observatory from the station tower overlooking the railroad tracks.

Pennsylvania Railroad Depot and signal tower with stairs far right Delphos Canal Museum

Leaving his bicycle at the bottom of the stairs, Leslie ran to the top of the tower where the late-night tower manager watched over operations and sent late night telegrams. Ω

The signal and telegraph tower in Delphos, Ohio where Leslie sent his telegram from to report his first comet discovery to Harvard College Observatory Delphos Canal Museum



PELTIER DISCOVERS NEW COMET

Delphos, O., Dec. 31. (AP)—In his home-made observatory on the family farm, Leslie C. Peltier goes star-gazing every night. In the day time, he works in a motor truck plant, but as soon as dusk falls his eye is glued to a telescope.

For five years, Peltier has ridden his hobby. His work has been fruitful for now a tailless comet bears his name.

He found it speeding through the skies November 13, and when he sent his findings to Harvard University for confirmation, he was notified that it was a discovery, and that the body would be named "Peltier's Comet."

Peltier is 25 years of age. He has been in on a number of star hunts during the five years he has been scouring the skies with his telescope.

He had a part in the discovery of one other comet and several stars. However, he was not the first to get trace of them, simply adding to the confirmation of these other discoveries.

He is a self-taught astronomer, but the scientific department of Harvard University has recognized his skill. The institution gave him his telescope.

Peltier built the observatory in an open field on his father's farm, members of his family helping him to erect it. It is a small frame building topped by a revolving sheet iron dome.

Four years ago, he started searching for a new heavenly body. It was a week after he sighted what is now known as Peltier's comet that the scientist at Harvard and Yerkes observatories got track of the body.

The Peltier comet is little more than a shadow in the sky. It is so far from the earth that no computation of the distance can be made.

Harvard College Observatory Cambridge, Ma.

…a telegram from Ohio to Massachusetts

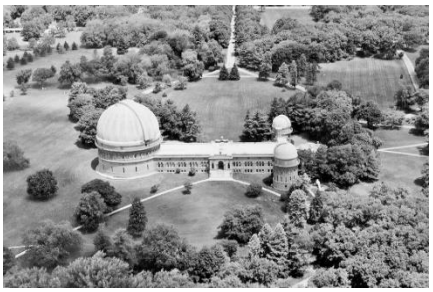
At the other end of the telegram was Harvard College Observatory. There had been a seven-year relationship up until then between Leslie and the Cambridge, Massachusetts institution. The American Association of Variable Star Observers was headquartered there and Leslie had been sending in monthly variable star estimates to them from his farm home in rural Ohio since 1918.

Dr. Harlow Shapely

Directed by Dr. Harlow Shapely, who knew of Leslie's AAVSO reports and from his doctoral mentor Dr. Henry Norris Russel of Princeton Observatory, who gave Leslie the 6-inch Fitz Comet Seeker.

It was Dr. Harlow Shapely who would years later, after Leslie's many accomplishments with the Comet Seeker, would give Leslie his title of "the most famous non-professional astronomer in the world."

The date and time stamped telegram reached Harvard in the very early morning hours of Saturday November 14th. Leslie knew he had to document his discovery and its location with Harvard as quickly as possible for the opportunity to be the first to observe a new comet. Whoever observes and documents a comet first with a recognized institution has the comet named after them. Once the observatory receives the notification, professional astronomers begin the search, identification and naming process.



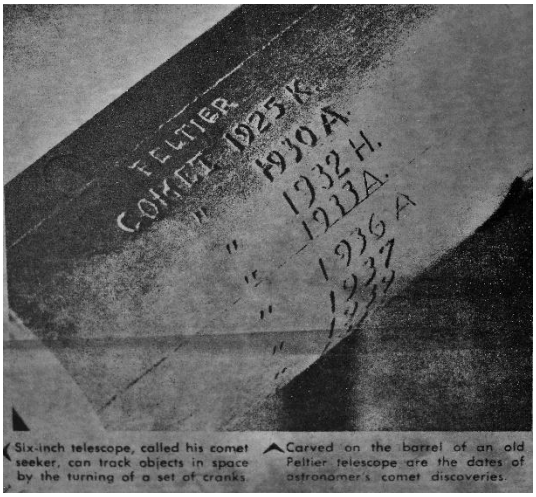
Yerkes Observatory Williams Bay, Wi.

Because of cloud cover over the eastern part of the United States beginning the next day after Leslie's discovery, Harvard and Yerkes Observatory in Wisconsin were unable to find and view the comet until seven-days later.

After comparing the date and time stamps of entries for the comet, Leslie had to share credit with someone from Poland.

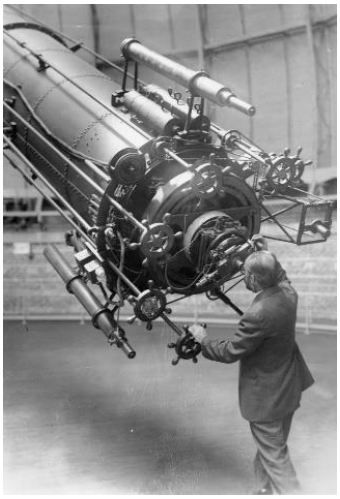
The comet was later photographed by Professor George Van-Biesbroeck of Yerkes Observatory.

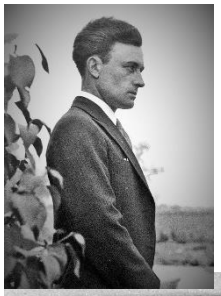
Once the comet was confirmed by Harvard, Leslie using his pocket knife first carved into the mahogany tube of the Comet Seeker the dates of Daniels comets then began carving his own dates. Ω



Peltier comet dates carved into the Fitz Comet Seeker

Professor George Van-Biesbroeck at his camera Yerkes Observatory





…the fame begins

After another five years comes Leslie's second comet, February 20th, 1930. The newspapers were quick to pick up the stories of Leslie's discoveries. Comet after comet, 12 in all, over a twenty-nine-year period brought not only national acclaim but also international recognition for Leslie and the Comet Seeker.

February 24th, 1930

COMETS PLAYTHINGS OF FARM BOY

Two Named for Star Gazer Whose Observatory Is Shed in Cow Pasture

BY KENNETH D. TOOILL

DELPHOS, OHIO, FEB. 24.—Just a farm boy who has made good in the heavens.

That's Leslie C. Peltier, the lad who, from a shack in the center of his father's cow pasture, three miles from this place, spots wandering comets that are muffed by the high foreheads at Harvard and other centers of learning, and has them named after him.

Leslie has just discovered his second comet which, from now on, will be known as "Peltier's No. 2, 1930." The other one, which still is in excellent running order and going strong, according to Leslie, is "Peltier's No. 1, 1925."

Just how this modest country boy with less than three years of high school education became an important figure in scientific circles is a long story in itself. That is, it covers quite a few years, for Leslie is 30. Yet, in the main, it is simplicity itself.

WHEN Leslie was a youngster on the fine farm where he was born and still lives with his father and mother, he preferred, on long summer evenings, to lie on his back atop a strawstack and ponder over the enigma of the heavens, rather than to hitch up old Bess and drive to Delphos for ice cream or an orgy of visit to relatives.

In fact, the elder Peltier often remarked that he never need worry about how Leslie spent his evenings, or where he was at bed time, for the answer was always the same—back of the barn on top of the strawstack looking at the stars.

This boyish curiosity never has diminished. After he went to the little red brick schoolhouse, three miles or more from home, and learned to read, the first extra-curricular books he wanted were works on astronomy—elementary at first, but finally great, erudite tomes with impressive charts and masses of bewildering mathematical data.

By the time he reached high school, he was so far ahead of his science teachers in matters pertaining to the heavenly bodies that they took lessons from him. He even began to write a little on the subject and now and then some of his calculations and hypotheses were printed in scientific periodicals.

L.C. PELTIER

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…Leslie's Comet Fame

NOW, he is an important contributor to popular Astronomy, has two comets named after him, receives visits from scientific scholars and has seen some of the product of his labors creep into standard text books on astronomy.

And nearly all his most important work was done in a strange-looking structure in his father's cow pasture.

Leslie's observatory resembles nothing so much as a henhouse that has gone high-hat. In fact, it isn't as large as the very fine henhouse that shelters the Peltier flock. On the roof is a dome, no larger than a good-sized hillock of hay, but as perfect in operation as that atop the observatory at Ohio State university, Harvard or any of the others. It has a removable cover on the narrow slip through which his telescope is pointed and the whole works revolves to reveal any portion of the sky.

The most remarkable thing about the whole outfit is the telescope. It is, in reality, a six-inch "comet-seeker," which differs from a telescope in details far from clear to a layman. At any rate, its diminutive size causes the casual observer to wonder how Leslie sees any more through it than would be visible through a pair of fieldglasses.

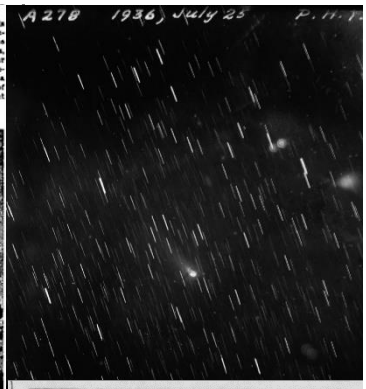
THE instrument was loaned to him by Princeton university officials more than 10 years ago in recognition of his remarkable native ability in astronomy, and since nothing has since been said about taking it back, Leslie may be pardoned for considering it almost in the light of a gift.

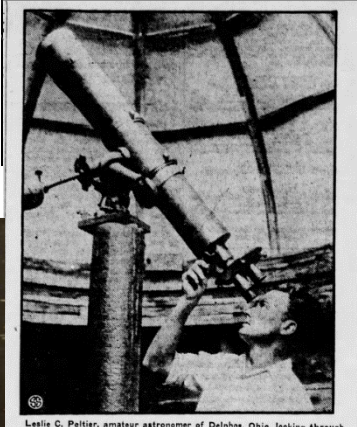
Admitting that it is an old model and that there are many finer instruments of modern make, Leslie wouldn't trade it for anything to be found at Yerkes or Mt. Wilson. In truth, it does seem a little wobbly, mounted as it is on top of a length of iron pipe, but one can hardly criticize an instrument that has accomplished as much as this one has, and brought as much honor to its user.

astronomers than professionals.

Particularly distinguished as an amateur astronomer is Leslie C. Peltier, who keeps tab on the skies in a self-constructed observatory on a farm near Delphos, O., and one of his comet finds has been given his name. Masaji Nagata, a Japanese who earns his living raising vegetables near Brawley, Calif., received the Comet Medal of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific, for noting and reporting a new comet to Mt. Wilson Observatory. These are typical of the practitioners of the most thrilling of all sports—"comet catching."

Leslie C. Peltier in His "Cornfield Observatory" Near Delphos, Ohio, Where His Amateur Astronomical Research Has Won Him World Wide Fame. Comets Can Be Discovered with Much Smaller Telescopes Than This. Messier, Frenchman, Found 15 with a Telescope Only Two Feet Long.



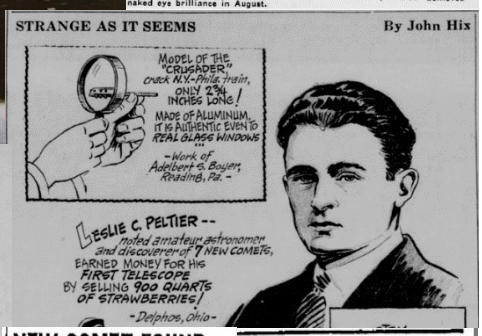


Leslie C. Peltier, amateur astronomer of Delphos, Ohio, looking through the telescope with which he discovered Peltier's comet, which achieved naked eye brilliance in August.

TO THE COMET PELTIER

Whence comest thou? And whither art thou bound?
Can aught like thee in cosmic depths be found?
Has Earth ere this been favoured with thy sight?
Hast thou no more to give of thy great light?
Thy radiant form I dimly can espy
Amidst the suns of Cassiopeia's sky
Across the vast abyss 'twixt thee and me,
There stream thy gentle rays. But who can see
Thy beauteous splendour at so great a range
Except by optics or immortal change?
Night after night, I gaze with longing eye
To trace thy trackless path across the sky,
Expecting that some time thy blazing trail
Would fill the heavens, and men from hill and dale
Proclaim thine advent to this little speck,—
A mote in space which giant orbs bedeck.
But hope grows dim as dimmer grows thy light.
Past constellations one by one, thy flight
Declares that other realms beyond my ken,—
(Immensity that baffles human pen,
Whose denizens of flaming fire whirl round
On orbits mighty, through the vast profound),
Are thine abode. Why should'st thou linger? Flee!
Since voices from the deep seem urging thee
To come. Thy light receding from my view
Is gone. Adieu! Fair Visitor, Adieu!

—Dr. Charles Cave.



NEW COMET FOUND BY YOUNG OHIOAN

Clerk at Delphos Finds Third "Stranger" in Heavens With Telescope.

Delphos, O., Aug. 19, (U.P.)—Leslie Peltier, 25, who clerks by day and sweeps the heavens by night with a home-spun telescope on the farm of his father, Stanley Peltier, has discovered another comet.

The comet, reported a week ago from Yerkes observatory, Madison, Wis., was by way of confirmation of Peltier's report to the astronomers at Madison, and Harvard observatory.

This marks the third comet discovered by Peltier since 1925. The second was found by him in 1930, at which time he received nation-wide recognition and publicity.

His latest celestial visitor is not discernable with the naked eye but may be found with field glasses, in the northwest, sweeping toward the north star.

OHIOAN FINDS NEW COMET IN NORTHERN SKY

Garage Employe Makes Fifth Discovery, Wins Fame as Amateur Astronomer.

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — (AP) — Leslie C. Peltier, garage employe of Delphos, O., a noted amateur astronomer, yesterday discovered the first new comet found this year, Dr. Howard Shapley, director of the Harvard college observatory, announced today.

The new comet is a body of the ninth magnitude, too faint to be seen by the unaided human eye but visible through small telescopes. It is moving slowly through the northern heavens near the pole.

Confirms Discovery.

Observations made by Dr. George Van Biewbroeck at Yerkes observatory at Williams bay, Wisconsin, confirmed the discovery. Harvard observatory photographed the new comet just before dawn break this morning.

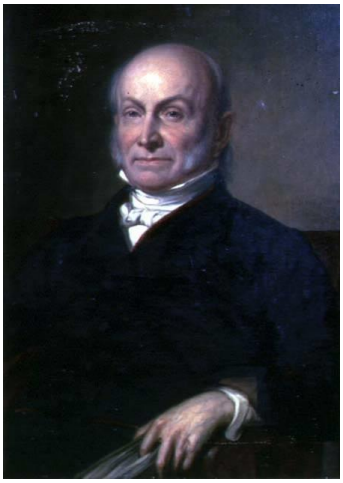
Ω

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS would have rejoiced in the achievement of young Leslie Peltier, self-educated astronomer, who has just discovered his fifth comet through an old six-inch telescope in a cow pasture in Delphos, Ohio.

Adams, one of the greatest of American minds, felt that astronomy was the subject best suited to arouse an interest in science in the new union. In 1843 there was not an observatory in the United States but a society was formed in Cincinnati to start one and John Quincy Adams, after serving as President and later as a Representative, agreed to journey from Massachusetts to Ohio to lay the cornerstone. He was 77 at the time and the strenuous journey brought on the illness that killed him. But he made many speeches on the trip and to the last helped to spread knowledge.

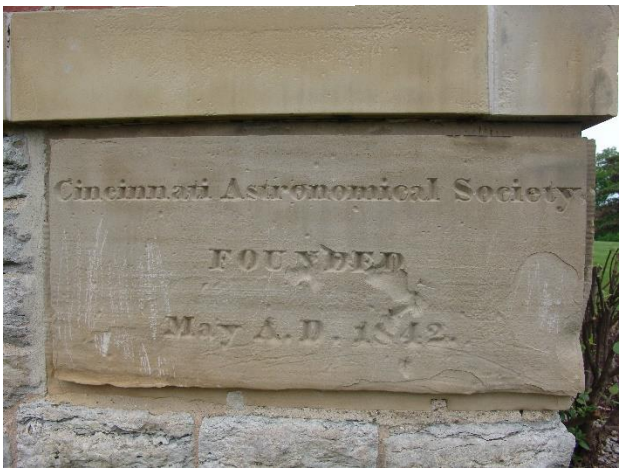
May 26, 1936 Bronx, New York

…Leslie and the President

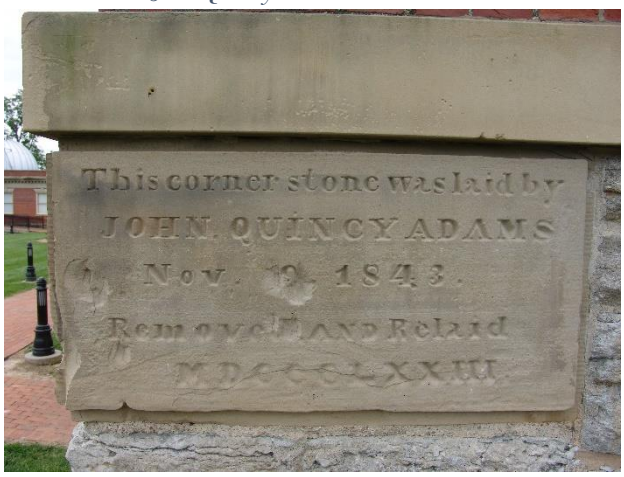


John Quincy Adams 1767-1848

The first Cincinnati Observatory where John Quincy Adams laid his cornerstone 1843



The oldest recognized astronomy club in the United States



The cornerstone was later re-laid at the second observatory 1873

The second and current Cincinnati Observatory

Cincinnati hosts the oldest operating telescope in the U. S.

Due to air pollution from the city of Cincinnati and the river boats on the Ohio River, a new observatory had to be built miles north of the city where it currently stands today. Ω

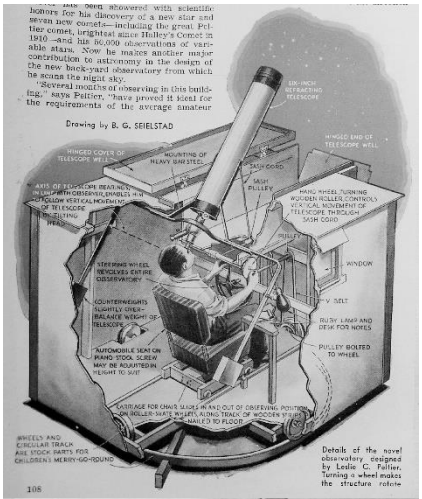
…a new look and a new home

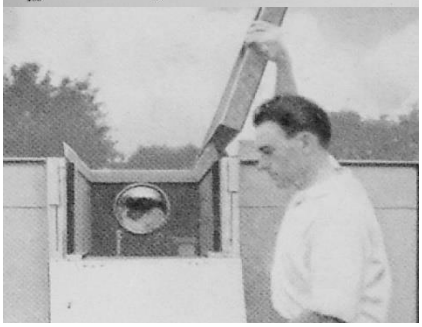
1933 was a year of travel for the Comet Seeker's objective lens. Riding throughout the southwestern states in a custom metal tube designed for the rigors of a nine-month honeymoon, camping trip. This is the first time the objective lens of the Comet Seeker was not used inside its mahogany and brass housing which stayed with the Cow Pasture observatory.

The metal tube was much lighter and able to be mounted on a three-legged tripod for the trip.

And now after fifteen years of service inside the Cow Pasture observatory the Princeton alumni was ready for a new makeover.

By 1937 it was time for another trip. Only this one would mean the end of dark rural skies, the Cow Pasture observatory and the Comet Seeker in all its original mahogany and brass glory.





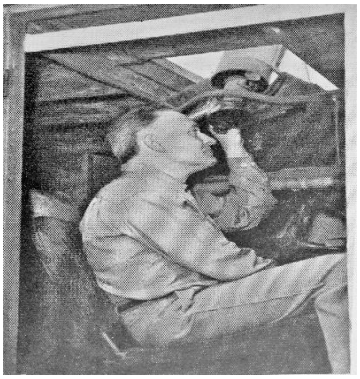
Leslie with the 6-inch Fitz objective lens now inside the new metal tube of the new Merry-Go-Round observatory

Miami & Erie Canal 1940

Moving from the cow pasture to the hundred-year-old canal path in the town of Delphos, Ohio would be its next adventure, at least for the 6-inch Fitz objective lens. The mahogany and brass tube would go into retirement. From its cow pasture skies and Princeton days, it has captured nine new comets and entertained thousands of sky watchers.

By the end of 1937 Leslie had built a new observatory to meet his need for portability. Needing to move away from the Cow Pasture observatory and into town, The Merry-Go-Round observatory was perfect for the next three moves that Leslie would have to make in his living situation.

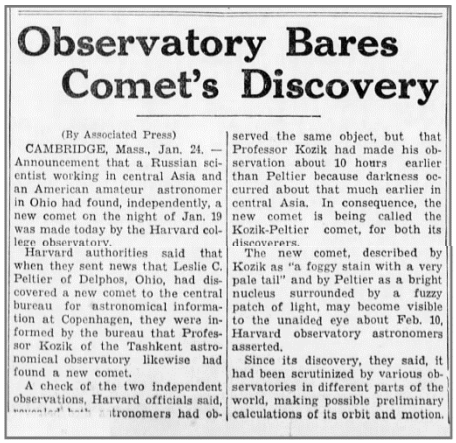
Now housed in a metal tube and installed inside the Merry-Go-Round, the 6-inch Fitz Comet Seeking objective lens had a new improved look. Not only was the Comet Seeker still the same comet hunting instrument it's always been, but now Leslie could view variable stars with increased speed and comfort from anywhere he lived.



Leslie continued to discover new comets using the 6-inch and its Merry-Go-Round observatory. However, he continued to carve their dates into the Comet Seeker's original mahogany wood tube.

1939 would bring Leslie's seventh comet discovered from the backyard canal path of the first rental house Leslie would live in. Also, the first comet for the Merry-Go-Round.

From the backyard of the second rental house that Leslie would live in, the Comet Seeker would capture three more comets during the WWII years of 1943, 1944 and 1945. Ω



Observatory Bares Comet's Discovery

(By Associated Press)

CAMBRIDGE, Mass., Jan. 24. — Announcement that a Russian scientist working in central Asia and an American amateur astronomer in Ohio had found, independently, a new comet on the night of Jan. 19 was made today by the Harvard college observatory.

Harvard authorities said that when they sent news that Leslie C. Peltier of Delphos, Ohio, had discovered a new comet to the central bureau for astronomical information at Copenhagen, they were informed by the bureau that Professor Kozik of the Tashkent astronomical observatory likewise had found a new comet.

A check of the two independent observations, Harvard officials said, revealed both astronomers had observed the same object, but that Professor Kozik had made his observation about 10 hours earlier than Peltier because darkness occurred about that much earlier in central Asia. In consequence, the new comet is being called the Kozik-Peltier comet, for both its discoverers.

The new comet, described by Kozik as "a foggy stain with a very pale tail" and by Peltier as a bright nucleus surrounded by a fuzzy patch of light, may become visible to the unaided eye about Feb. 10, Harvard observatory astronomers asserted.

Since its discovery, they said, it had been scrutinized by various observatories in different parts of the world, making possible preliminary calculations of its orbit and motion.

The First Merry-Go-Round Comet Jan. 19th, 1939

…the Comet Seekers next adventure

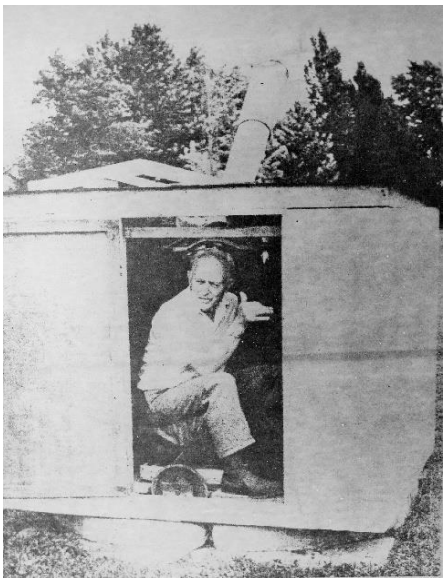
1948 would find the Comet Seeker making its next move. A move that would give the Merry-Go-Round a permanent concrete foundation and home for the next forty-four years until 1992.

The next four years would be quiet years at Brookhaven for the Comet Seeker with monthly reports still being sent to the AAVSO headquarters faithfully by Leslie since 1918.

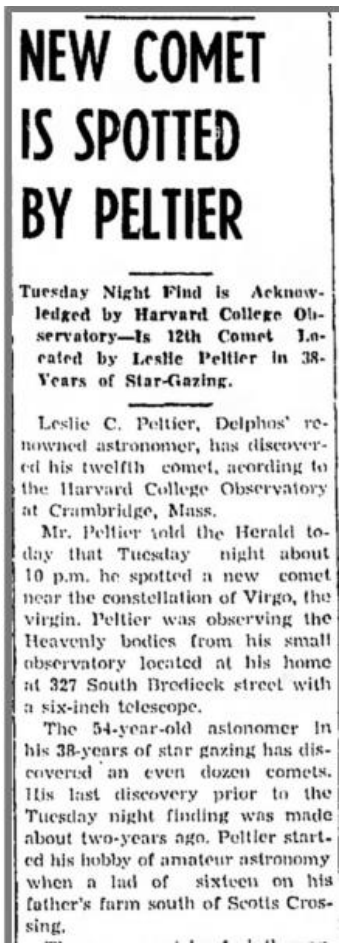
The night of June 20th, 1952 would bring Leslie his eleventh comet discovered.

And in the summer of 1954 the Comet Seeker would capture its 12th and final newly discovered comet.

The Comet Seeker would spend the rest of its days with Leslie hunting comets and variable stars until Leslie's passing in 1980.



1950s The Comet Seeker at Brookhaven



NEW COMET IS SPOTTED BY PELTIER

Tuesday Night Find is Acknowledged by Harvard College Observatory—Is 12th Comet Located by Leslie Peltier in 38-Years of Star-Gazing.

Leslie C. Peltier, Delphos' renowned astronomer, has discovered his twelfth comet, acording to the Harvard College Observatory at Crambridge, Mass.

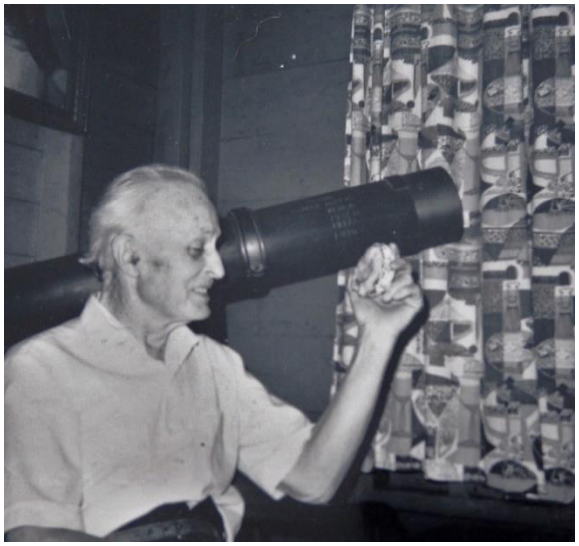
Mr. Peltier told the Herald today that Tuesday night about 10 p.m. he spotted a new comet near the constellation of Virgo, the virgin. Peltier was observing the Heavenly bodies from his small observatory located at his home at 327 South Brodieck street with a six-inch telescope.

The 54-year-old astonomer in his 38-years of star gazing has discovered an even dozen comets. His last discovery prior to the Tuesday night finding was made about two-years ago. Peltier started his hobby of amateur astronomy when a lad of sixteen on his father's farm south of Scotts Crossing.

Sometime after Leslie's passing, the 6-inch Fitz Comet Seeking lens was removed from the metal tube of the Merry-Go-Round by the family and reunited with the original mahogany and brass tube.

The Comet Seeker is safe with the family and hopefully will make an appearance again one day. Ω

1975 Leslie with the tube and mount of the Comet Seeker outside the 12-inch Clark Observatory



1980 Last photo of Leslie with his 6-inch Fitz Comet Seeker inside the 12-inch Clark Observatory

TIME CAPSULES *with Leslie C. Peltier*

"The Merry-Go-Round" by Vinny Strosnider

2016 The Merry-Go-Round Observatory Currently located and operating at the John Bryan State Park Observatory

…is that a garden shed?

Sitting among an array of special observatories and telescopes, behind a very tall fence, sits an unassuming little six-foot by six-foot wooden building that could be mistaken for a garden shed. With its square shape, sheet metal roof and white painted exterior, this little garden shed is quite possibly the oldest and most famous homemade observatory in the U. S. still being used today.

Made famous by Delphos, Ohio's Leslie Peltier in his autobiography "*Starlight Nights the Adventures of a Star Gazer*."

Built out of necessity, this little twirling box has garnered the attention of professional academia as well as curious onlookers for decades. From its conception, it was built out of a need for portability.

…in the beginning

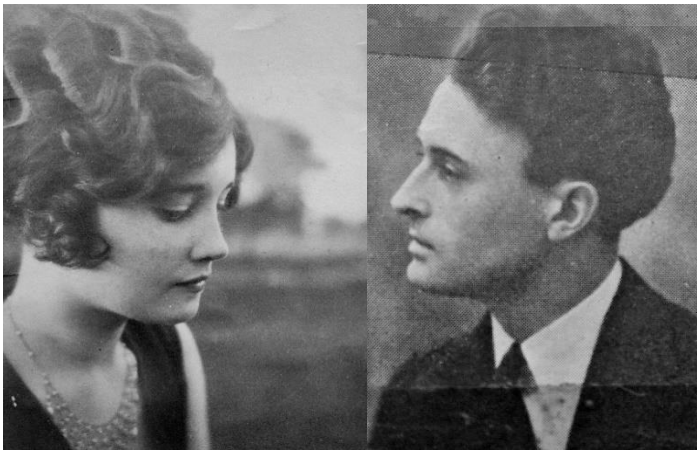
During his life on the farm, Leslie and his dad had built an observatory in 1921 out in the middle of an adjoining field next to the farm house called the Cow Pasture observatory. By 1936 Leslie was nationally known for his discovery of comets and stars using this observatory.


Merry-Go-Round

Observatory

ACE AMATEUR STARGAZER STALKS COMETS WITH A NOVEL TELESCOPE MOUNT HE BUILT FOR HIMSELF

Popular Science February 1940 "Ace Amateur Stargazer" Leslie Peltier



After living on the farm with his parents for twenty-something years, Leslie began noticing a girl that lived on the edge of town. As the story goes in "*Starlight Nights*," a nod turned into a wave, then a honk of the Model-T horn, and finally a face-to-face with the girl he would marry.

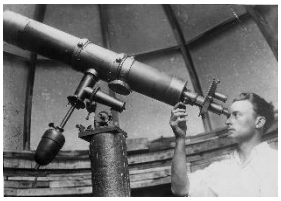
Once Leslie and Dottie were married in 1933 Leslie left the farm home of his parents. Ω

Dorotha Nihiser meets Leslie Peltier

…it's moving time

1933 Leslie and Dottie's Wedding courtesy of the Delphos Canal Museum

Moving across the road into his grandfather's farm house which was now owned by his uncle, Leslie and Dottie settled into married life with Leslie still using the Cow Pasture observatory. After a few years, Leslie's uncle Ralph and his wife sent news to Leslie that they would be returning home. It was now time for them to get ready to move again. Running out of family farm houses to live in, they needed to look for a rental house in the town of Delphos close by.



Still wanting to continue stargazing wherever he lived, he needed to come up with a solution for housing his 6-inch Fitz Comet Seeker.

Leslie at his drafting table for the Delphos Bending Company courtesy of the Delphos Canal Museum

In the midwinter months of 1934-35, Leslie had started working as a draftsman for a company in town that had just added children's toy furniture to their manufacturing.

One day in 1937 while at his drafting table, Leslie sat back in his office chair and began to think of a way to build an observatory that would house his telescope, be as comfortable as his drafting chair and easy to relocate. Necessity became the mother of invention and the Merry-Go-Round observatory was born. Construction began and finished on the farm in 1937-38.

Leslie removed the objective lens from the mahogany wood tube of the Comet Seeker and fashioned it into the metal tube of the Merry-Go-Round. Once Leslie began using the newly built observatory, he found that he could observe variable stars with improved speed. His observatory in the cow pasture needed manual rotation of the dome and scope for each section of the night sky observed. This took much time. However, this new contraption the "Merry-Go-Round" greatly increased his nightly observing schedule.

From 1938 to 1940 the Merry-Go-Round observatory was used at a rental house located on the pathway of the Miami and Erie canal with his seventh comet being discovered there in 1939.

In 1940 they moved, yet again, into another rental house. From this Delphos, Ohio backyard three more comets were discovered with the metal Comet Seeker inside the Merry-Go-Round observatory.

The second rental house.

1940 to 1948 This is the backyard where Leslie discovered 3 more comets during the WWII war years of 1943, 1944 and 1945 using the Merry-Go-Round observatory Ω

…its moving time again

"Brookhaven" Leslie and Dottie's home

In 1948 Dottie Peltier came across the home of her dreams, "Brookhaven." Surrounded by acres of yard with a 100-acre stone quarry at the rear of the property, Leslie began plotting where he would mark the permanent home for the Merry-Go-Round observatory. Here the rotating box stayed from 1948 until 1992.

Leslie and Dottie's home "Brookhaven" to the left, the concrete pad for the Merry-Go-Round observatory at the right of this photo

Leslie at his "Open Air" observatory with the 4-inch Mogey refractor from Harvard and his open-air desk for his star charts and atlas far left in the photo

Leslie's first attempt at having a backyard observatory was in 1920. The "Open Air" observatory and desk built for the 4-inch Mogey refractor.

In 1921 the "Cow Pasture" observatory was built, first hosting the 4-inch Mogey and then the 6-inch Fitz refractor.

In 1937 the "Merry-Go-Round" was built with the 6-inch metal Comet Seeker in mind.

The Cow-Pasture observatory from 1921 to 1939

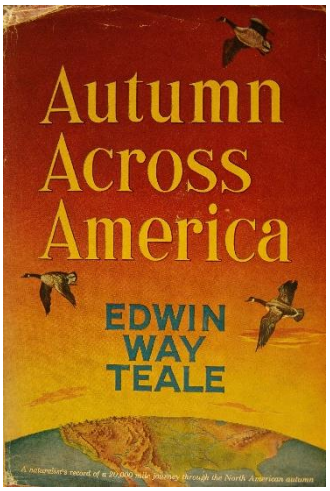
The Merry-Go-Round 1938 to Present Day

And in 1959 a gift presented to Leslie from the Miami University of Oxford, Ohio

…a 12-inch Clark refractor complete with observatory dome and transit room.

The 12 inch Clark observatory 1959 to 1994

After a few comet discoveries, many articles in the national newspapers and being labeled the "world's most famous amateur astronomer," Leslie received many visitors of notable academia. People would come from other parts of the world to visit with Leslie and his observatories. Walter Scott Houston beginning in 1932, and one of the most famous astronomers of our day corresponded and visited with Leslie …David H. Levy. Ω



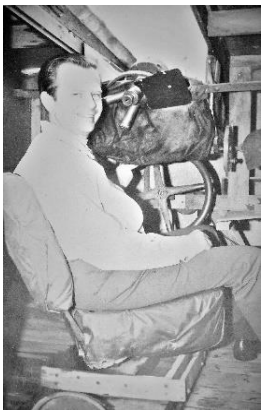
A 20,000-mile Journey
University of Connecticut

…a far-off visitor

Another visitor was Edwin Way Teale, the man who encouraged Leslie to write "*Starlight Nights*." This famous author from the 1940s, and 50s twice visiting from Connecticut with his wife, wrote of the famous Leslie Peltier and his comet seeking Merry-Go-Round observatory…

… "**After he left the farm and moved to Delphos, where he is designer for a furniture factory, Peltier built his second observatory in his back yard. It is even smaller and more economical than the first. We walked out to it, a simple white box about six feet square, resting on a concrete foundation at the edge of a dahlia garden next to a patch of late sweet corn. The sheet metal of its flat roof was below the level of my eyes. This observatory, in which Peltier has discovered five of his comets, was made mainly from odds and ends. Its total cost was fifteen dollars, less than the amount paid for the original spyglass telescope.**

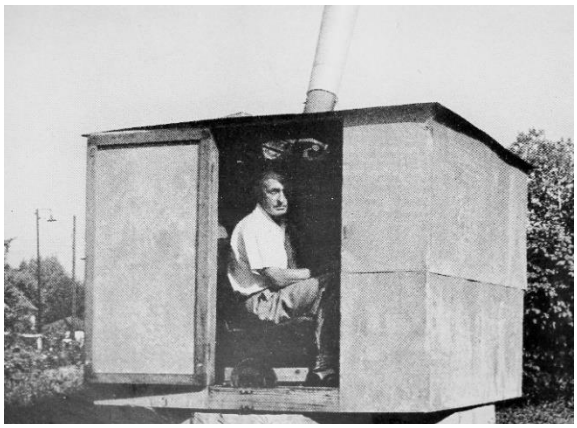
He swung open the door. On hot summer nights, it is held ajar by the pressure of a down-bent portion of the edge of the metal roof; in winter weather, it is kept shut by means of a simple hook and eye. Everything about the observatory is unpretentious, often improvised. The "dew shield" at the end of the telescope is merely a sheet of corrugated cardboard held loosely around the barrel by a strand of wire. It can be slipped out of the way when the telescope is lowered into the box observatory and the opening in the roof is closed to make the interior watertight.



Geo. Lindbloom AAVSO

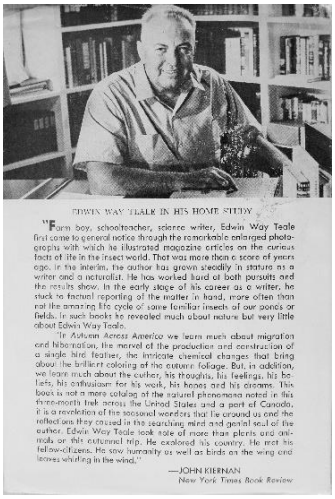
I peered inside. Just within the door one half of the front seat of a junkyard automobile had been mounted behind the eyepiece of the telescope. I eased myself into this seat and looked around the crowded interior. The counterweights on the telescope were pieces of lead from a discarded battery. Just in front of my knees there rose a steering wheel salvaged from another junked automobile. I turned it and the whole box of the observatory began rotating on small flanged wheels that followed the circle of a single rail mounted on the concrete foundation. Above my right hand a disk of wood carried a knob at its edge. Winding this disk elevated or depressed the end of the telescope. Elbow-high on my right, a shelf held a loose-leaf book of star maps and jottings on the backs of envelopes beneath a ten-watt photographic safelight in a crook-necked lamp. This faint illumination is all that is needed for making notes, and it does not affect Peltier's eyes sufficiently to upset his judgment of the comparative brilliance of distant stars.

I slid out of the seat and walked back to the house. That evening, as soon as it became dark, we planned to return to this telescope that had brought first intelligence to the world of existence of nearly a dozen comets. Through it we would watch autumn stars. At Delphos, the evening came at last. And while twilight deepened into darkness we lingered over the chicken, hot biscuits, the muskmelon, the peach cobbler, the long train into darkness of a Midwestern feast Mrs. Peltier had prepared. We listened to recollections of a time, when Peltier just married, made a living collecting rocks in the southwest for the Ward's Natural History Establishment of Rochester, New York. Ω



1950s Leslie Peltier and his Merry-Go-Round observatory
Photo taken by Edwin Teal during his 1st visit to Delphos, Ohio

It was after eight o'clock when we finally started for the observatory. At that moment, the great disappointment of the trip enveloped us. Ever since the storm at Cape May the skies had been clear. For half a month, afterwards the nights were cloudless and brilliant with stars. On this one evening of all those many evenings, dense overcast had spread across the sky, sheeting it from horizon to horizon, making invisible every planet, blanketing every star. It was a long time before I could accept the reality of this fact. Endlessly I turned the steering wheel that revolved the observatory. Endlessly I wound the wooden disc that raised and lowered the telescope. I was like a pilot caught above fog, seeking a hole which to escape. Everything was uniform blankness. Only once the telescope recorded light, a sudden glow of brilliant red like some rare heavenly body. It was the ruby warning lamp at the top of the radio tower.



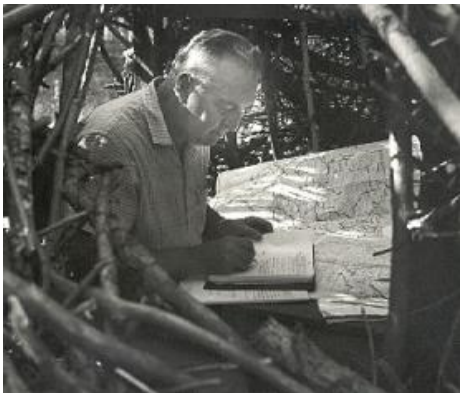
EDWIN WAY TEALE IN HIS HOME STUDY

"Farm boy, schoolteacher, science writer, Edwin Way Teale first came to general notice through the remarkable enlarged photographs with which he illustrated magazine articles on the curious facts of life in the insect world. That was more than a score of years ago. In the interim, the author has grown steadily in stature as a writer and a naturalist. He has worked hard at both pursuits and the results show. In the early stage of his career as a writer, he stuck to factual reporting of the matter in hand, more often than not the amazing life cycle of some familiar insects of our ponds or fields. In such books he revealed much about nature but very little about Edwin Way Teale.

"In Autumn Across America we learn much about migration and hibernation, the marvel of the production and construction of a single bird feather, the intricate chemical changes that bring about the brilliant coloring of the autumn foliage. But, in addition, we learn much about the author, his thoughts, his feelings, his beliefs, his enthusiasm for his work, his hopes and his dreams. This book is not a mere catalog of the natural phenomena noted in this three-month trek across the United States and a part of Canada, it is a revelation of the seasonal wonders that lie around us and the reflections they caused in the searching mind and genial soul of the author. Edwin Way Teale took note of more than plants and animals on this autumnal trip. He explored his country. He met his fellow-citizens. He saw humanity as well as birds on the wing and leaves whirling in the wind."

—JOHN KIERNAN
New York Times Book Review

Edwin Way Teale in his study



At length, I gave up. The looked-forward-to experience was not for us. We had, however, met a man of lasting interest and that was worth traveling far to find; we had made friends in Delphos. But the stars and planets still moved invisible behind their veil of overcast when we bade the Peltiers good bye that night."

Edwin Way Teale nature writer, inside his famous hand built "Brush Pile" writing room, located on his property in Hampton, Connecticut. Here the birds would visit while Teale wrote his stories.

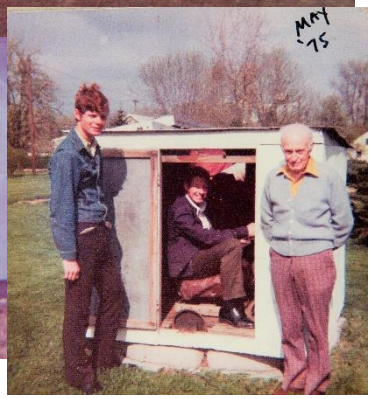
Photos and texts of Edwin Way Teale and his books are courtesy of the University of Connecticut

…the AAVSO

Many of the visitors to Leslie's world would also be fellow variable star gazers. In 1918 Leslie joined the American Association of Variable Star Observers. The AAVSO is comprised of amateur astronomers using their resources to help professional astronomy monitor variable star activity by recording the magnitude activity of these stars on a regular basis. Monthly reports are recorded and sent to the AAVSO headquarters. Ω

Literally hundreds of people visited Leslie and at least one of his observatories over the years. Neighbors, Boy Scouts, Sunday Schools, Garden Clubs, Observatory Directors, and AAVSO members

Canis Major Leslie's faithful Collie



1968 and ready for starlight nights
The Merry-Go-Round observatory with the metal 6-inch Fitz Comet Seeker

…the unsung hero

The story of the Merry-Go-Round observatory cannot be told without also remembering the sacrifice of someone who had the foresight to rescue Leslie's last remaining observatory.

After Leslie's passing in 1980, Dottie at age 70 and living alone, was left with an immense house and estate to take care of. However, during the course of her life, Dottie was unable to maintain all that the old wooden observatories needed.

The following newspaper article tells the rest of the story…

Dayton Daily News June 16, 1993 - paraphrased

"…starlight nights on a New Mexico mountaintop turned U. S. Airforce Major Roger J Hoffman into the man who would restore a famous amateur astronomer's homemade observatory.

Major Hoffman began his research after reading Peltier's "*Starlight Nights*." Wanting to visit the author he drove to Delphos, Ohio. Knocking on the door with no one answering, he searched out a neighbor. Learning of Peltier's passing from the neighbor, Major Hoffman inquired about the observatories. Learning that they were still on the property, he investigated. It was discovered that after Ten years of non-use and weather decay, these observatories were beyond repair or restoration.

Major Hoffman says the Merry-Go-Round observatory is historically unique. The first of its kind. Gaining permission from Mrs. Peltier, Major Hoffman relocated the observatory to his home, now in Ohio, and began teardown and new reconstruction in 1992."

The last day at Brookhaven July 18, 1992

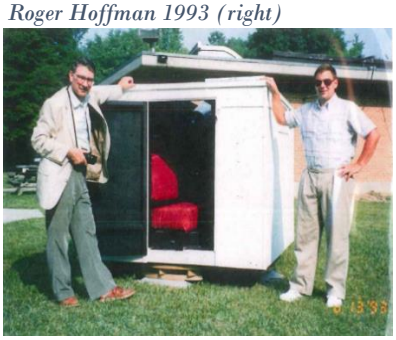
One year and fourteen-hundred dollars later, the Merry-Go-Round observatory was reconstructed and relocated to John Bryan State Park in 1993, where it remains to this day, still in use. A second restoration of the wood structure was accomplished in 2009. Leslie's telescopes are safe with the Peltier family.

Thank you, Roger Hoffman. Ω

Most of the original interior metal parts of the Merry-Go-Round were used in the 1993 reconstruction. Model-T steering wheel, Model-A seat frame, metal counterweight arm, track wheels and wooden hand disc and dowel. All other wood, sheet metal roof, and metal counterweights had to be replaced and a new telescope with new objective lens and focuser was constructed. Leslie's Comet Seeker is safe with the family

1993 restoration at John Bryan State Park

Roger Hoffman 1993 (right)



TIME CAPSULES *with Leslie C. Peltier*

"The 12-inch Clark"

1960s Leslie Peltier at his 12-inch Clark Refractor
Photo courtesy of the Allen County Historical Society

…it's just after the civil war in 1868

and time for the nation to mend and go forward. An astronomical master piece is ordered and in the works.

Professor J. M. Van Vleck, Wesleyan University Connecticut, has just inquired of Alvin Clark and Sons, telescope makers in Massachusetts, to fashion a piece of astronomical history.

For those who do not know, the name Alvin Clark in the telescope world is synonymous to the name Rolls Royce in the automotive world. Master craftsmen of glass lens objectives for the largest refractor telescopes in the world.

Telescope making in the 1800s was different then than it is today. The larger telescopes of today use mirrors to capture the image and the eyepiece magnifies the image. Telescopes of today are much smaller and lighter than their predecessors of yesteryear.

It was customary for the telescopes of the 1800s and earlier to use two glass lenses, known as the "Flint and Crown", fitted together known as the "Objective Lens," to capture images. The larger the diameter of the objective lens, the longer the tube had to be between the eyepiece and objective lens to bring an image into focus. Ω

1870s Alvin Clark and Sons Alvin Clark, Father -center
Alvin Graham Clark -left, George Bassett Clark -right

1896 Alvin Graham Clark and the 40-inch Yerkes Objective Lens
The largest scientific telescope lens ever ground and still in use

1921 Yerkes Observatory and the 40-inch Clark Telescope
Can you find Albert Einstein?

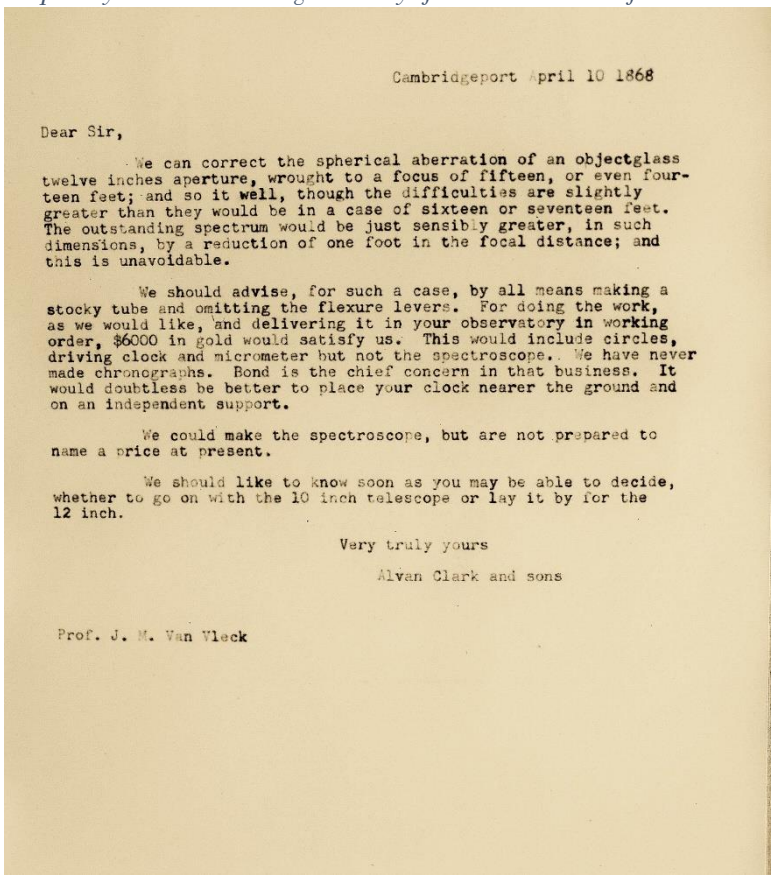
…six thousand dollars in Gold

Professor Van Vleck, a professional astronomer of his day, contacted Alvin Cark inquiring as to the cost and details of building a refractor telescope for use in the university's observatory. Alvin Clark and sons responded, by letter, as to the initial cost and parts required.

Before the end of that year a sixteen-foot long refractor with a 12-inch objective lens was finished and ready to be installed into the cylinder dome of the university's observatory.

Observatory Hall Wesleyan University
The first home of the 12-inch Clark Refractor

The following photos, and type written descriptions come from a scrapbook compiled by Leslie documenting the history of his 12-inch Clark refractor 1960s



Cambridgeport April 10 1868

Dear Sir,

We can correct the spherical aberration of an objectglass twelve inches aperture, wrought to a focus of fifteen, or even fourteen feet; and so it well, though the difficulties are slightly greater than they would be in a case of sixteen or seventeen feet. The outstanding spectrum would be just sensibly greater, in such dimensions, by a reduction of one foot in the focal distance; and this is unavoidable.

We should advise, for such a case, by all means making a stocky tube and omitting the flexure levers. For doing the work, as we would like, and delivering it in your observatory in working order, $6000 in gold would satisfy us. This would include circles, driving clock and micrometer but not the spectroscope. We have never made chronographs. Bond is the chief concern in that business. It would doubtless be better to place your clock nearer the ground and on an independent support.

We could make the spectroscope, but are not prepared to name a price at present.

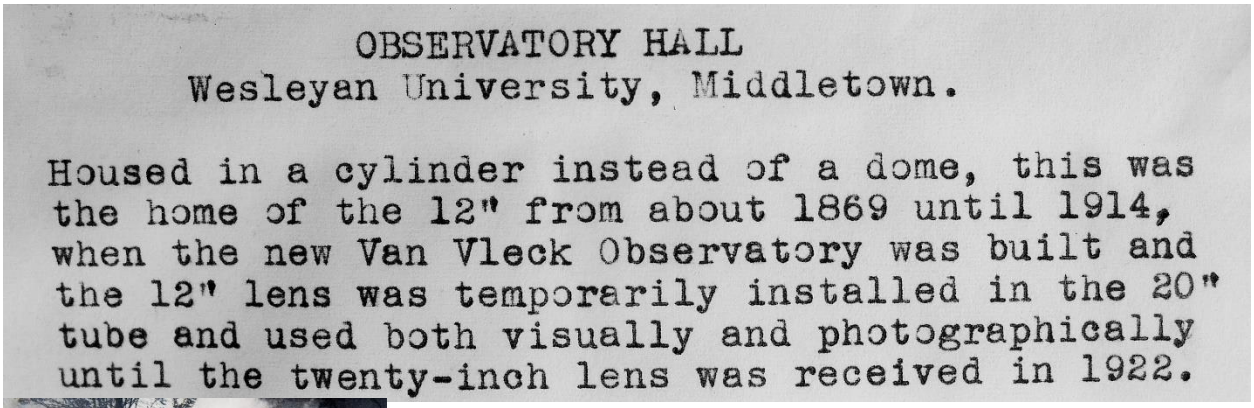
We should like to know soon as you may be able to decide, whether to go on with the 10 inch telescope or lay it by for the 12 inch.

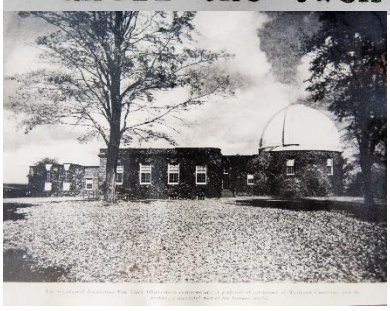
Very truly yours

Alvan Clark and sons

Prof. J. M. Van Vleck

A copy of the actual letter sent by Clark and Sons responding to Prof. Van Vleck

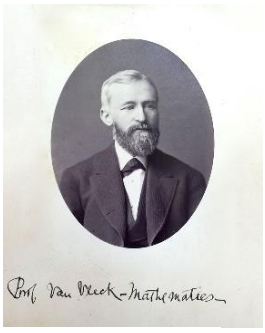




It was in 1914 that the glass objective lens of the 12-inch Clark refractor was removed from the original Clark telescope tube and inserted into a 20-inch Werner and Swasey telescope tube, housed inside the new Van Vleck Observatory. The 12-inch Clark objective lens was used in this way for eight years while the new 20-inch glass objective was being ground and polished by the master craftsmen. Ω

The new Van Vleck Observatory The second home of the 12-inch Clark refractor objective

VAN VLECK OBSERVATORY
20" lens by Lundin of Alvan Clark & Sons. Mounting by Warner and Swasey. The 33 ft. rising floor has a vertical range of 10 ft. The 12" lens was temporarily used in this tube from 1914 to 1922 while awaiting completion of the 20" objective.



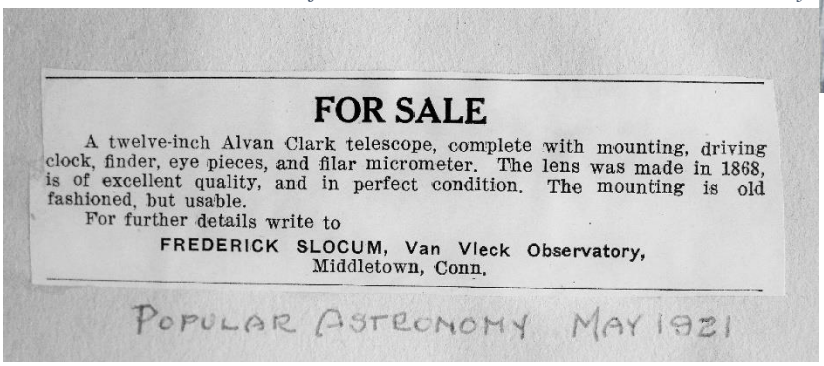
J. M. Van Vleck

Professor John Monroe Van Vleck mathematician and astronomer.

The inspiration behind the 12-inch Clark refractor in 1868.

Taught mathematics and astronomy over fifty years at Wesleyan University Middletown, Connecticut 1853 to 1912.

The 20-inch refractor housed inside the new Van Vleck Observatory



FOR SALE

A twelve-inch Alvan Clark telescope, complete with mounting, driving clock, finder, eye pieces, and filar micrometer. The lens was made in 1868, is of excellent quality, and in perfect condition. The mounting is old fashioned, but usable.
For further details write to
FREDERICK SLOCUM, Van Vleck Observatory,
Middletown, Conn.

POPULAR ASTRONOMY MAY 1921

A sales add was placed in Popular Astronomy magazine May 1921

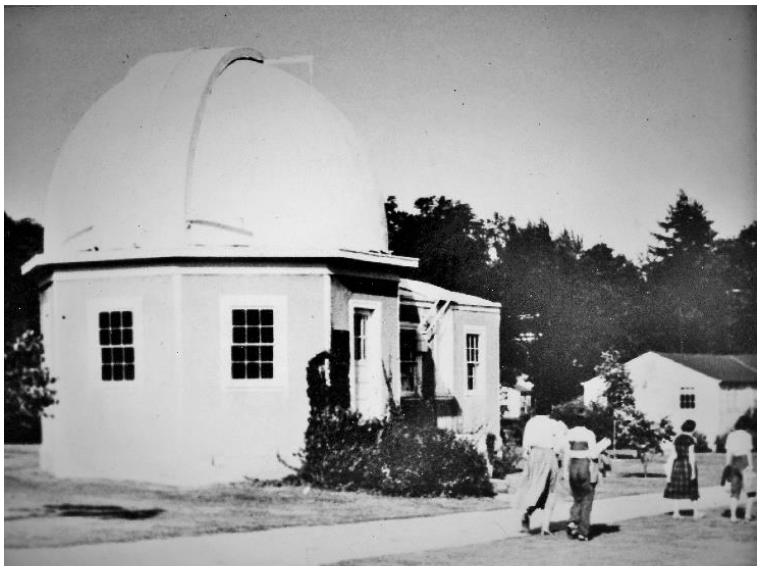
Once the 20-inch Clark objective lens was delivered to the Van Vleck Observatory, it was installed into its 20-inch tube. Now was the time to find a new home for the 12-inch Clark refractor.

In 1923 the 12-inch Clark refractor objective lens, telescope housing and mount finds a new home at the McFarland Observatory, Miami University Oxford, Ohio.

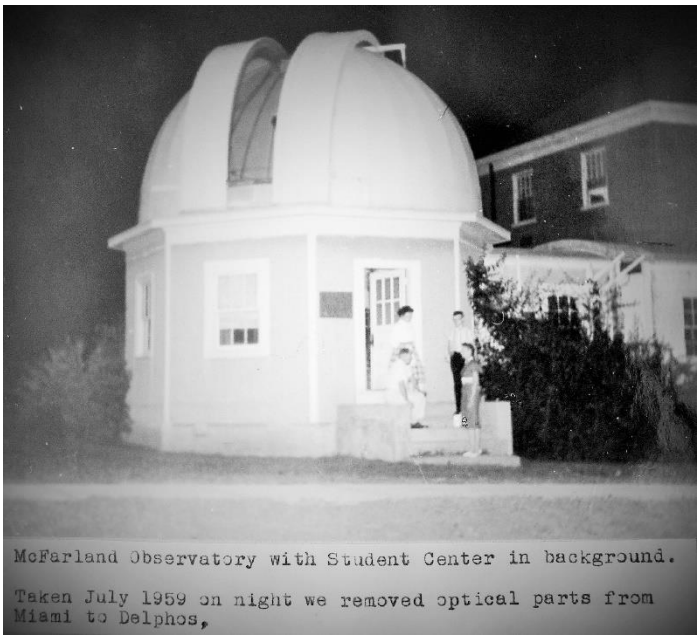
Procured by Dr. Anderson, Professor of the Astronomy Dept.

Dr. Anderson was in his eighties when the 12-inch Clark was given its famous fourth and final home. Ω

Dr. Anderson



McFarland Observatory Miami University Oxford, Ohio

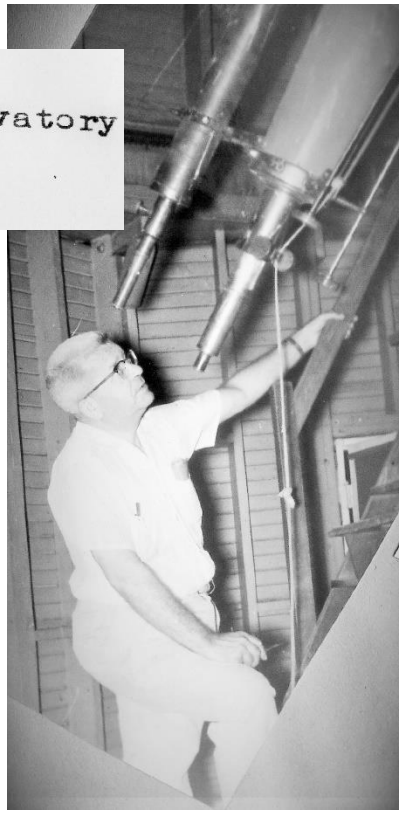

McFarland Observatory with Student Center in background.

Taken July 1959 on night we removed optical parts from Miami to Delphos,

…big time telescope, small town pride

Leslie Peltier "the world's most famous amateur astronomer" receives a call from his son, a student at Miami University in 1959, asking if he would like a bigger telescope. The phone call goes on to explain that the university is expanding and that they are removing the old observatory to make room to build a new dormitory.

As soon as Leslie's friends learn of the offer, they begin to call in their resources to bring the big telescope and observatory to the small town of Delphos, Ohio.


Prof. Miltenberger
Director of McFarland Observatory
At 12" refractor.
July 1959

Professor Miltenberger of Miami University on the night the 12-inch lens is removed

Dismantling of the observatory and telescope began a week or so after Leslie brought home the 12-inch Clark objective lens.

Louie Justus, the president of the company that Leslie worked for, made the arrangements for the equipment that was needed to move the big observatory and telescope 125 miles to Leslie's backyard.

Three weeks after the initial phone call, another call came early one morning from the contractor saying everything was loaded and ready to deliver. Ω


The dismantling of the observatory and its removal from Miami University to Delphos was done by Muth Bros. of Dayton. Four trucks were required to move it all.

To transport the 22 foot dome it was necessary to saw it in half and then nest the two canvas and wood framed halves together to fit it onto the trailer.

…meet you at the edge of town

was what Leslie told the contractor. Leslie met the delivery trucks and they followed him to the location where he wanted them to unload. Leslie had it all thought out so that the transit room would line up with the end of Walnut street.

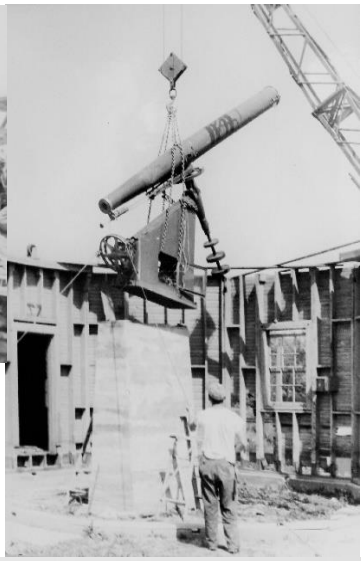
The dismantled observatory as it appeared when first brought to Delphos. The transit room (left) was unloaded in its permanent location and its foundation walls built beneath it. Several of the octagonal wall sections can be seen between the transit room and dome. The telescope was placed on level ground and given a coat of red oxide.

Several times during the winter of 1959-60 the lens and tailpiece were placed in the tube and the lens tested and low-altitude variable stars observed. During the testing it was found that at some time in the past the elements of the objective had been incorrectly assembled so that the double convex crown element was in backward. When properly re-assembled the blue halo, which had been so conspicuous around all bright star images, had disappeared!

Transit rooms were designed for the sole purpose of accurate time keeping. In the early days of timekeeping, astronomers used a transit scope to view stars as they crossed the meridian line overhead through an opening in the roof. Time was measured by the rotation of the earth. Professional astronomers would telegraph the railroads with the accurate times. Ω

The work of re-assembling the observatory walls, mounting the telescope on the new pier, placing the dome in position and rebuilding the sliding shutters was all done by Ray Ulm, contractor, with his two assistants, Bob Miller and Paul Grilliot. The use of the large crane and its operator was donated by the Fruehauf Trailer Company. April-May- June 1960

The telescope pier was placed in the meridian by aligning the concrete forms, at night, with two plumb lines set in line with the true north position in the sky.



Leslie mentions that he grew up in a family that didn't throw things away. Leslie used the boards from the old Cow Pasture observatory to build the form for the concrete pier.

Ω

After the crane finished mounting the 22-foot dome

…then came the helpers

Once the major construction was finished by the professional crews, then came the odds and ends that volunteers could help with.

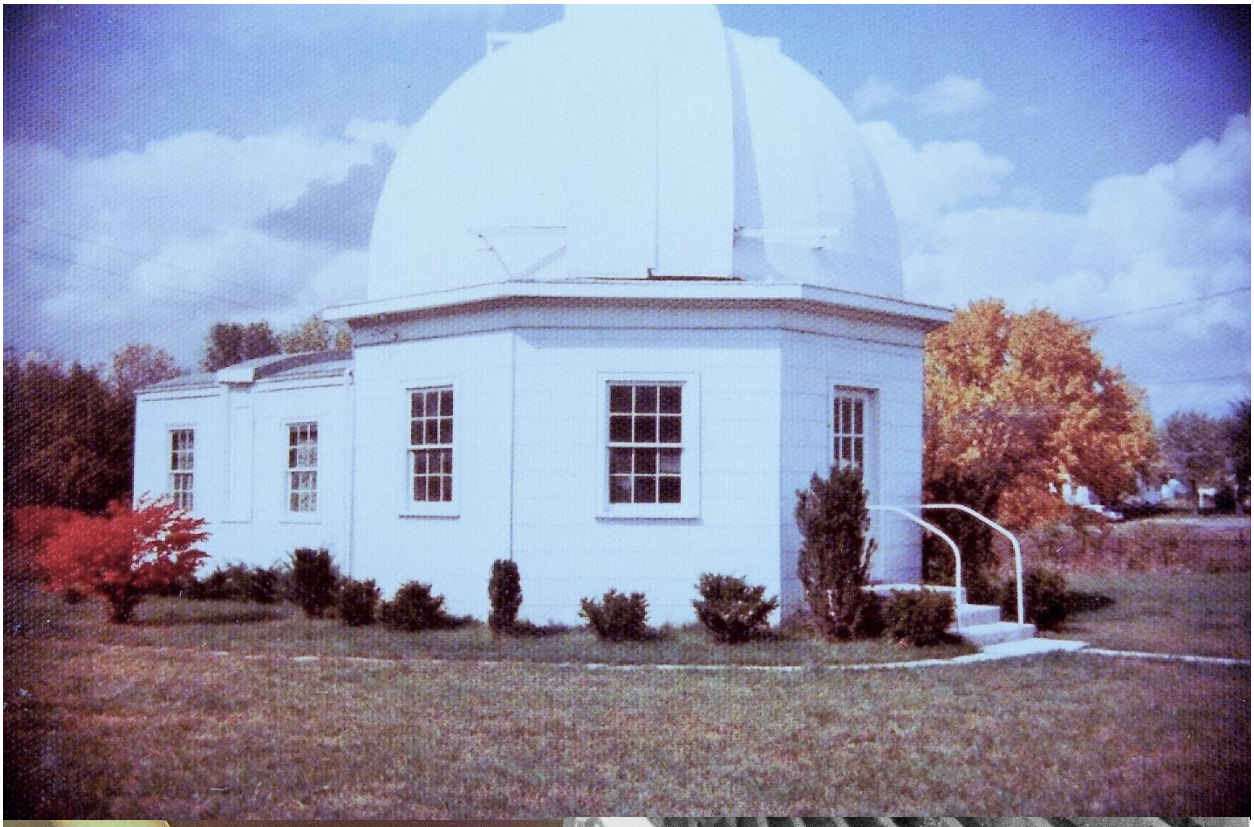
Family, friends and other stargazers would help with the new addition to Delphos.

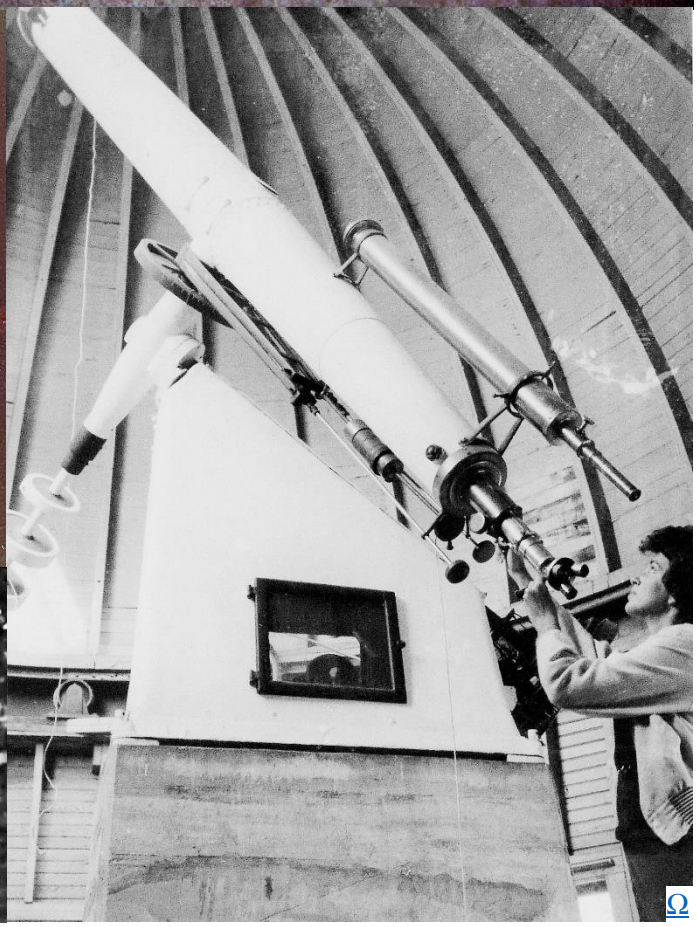
Carolyn Hurless

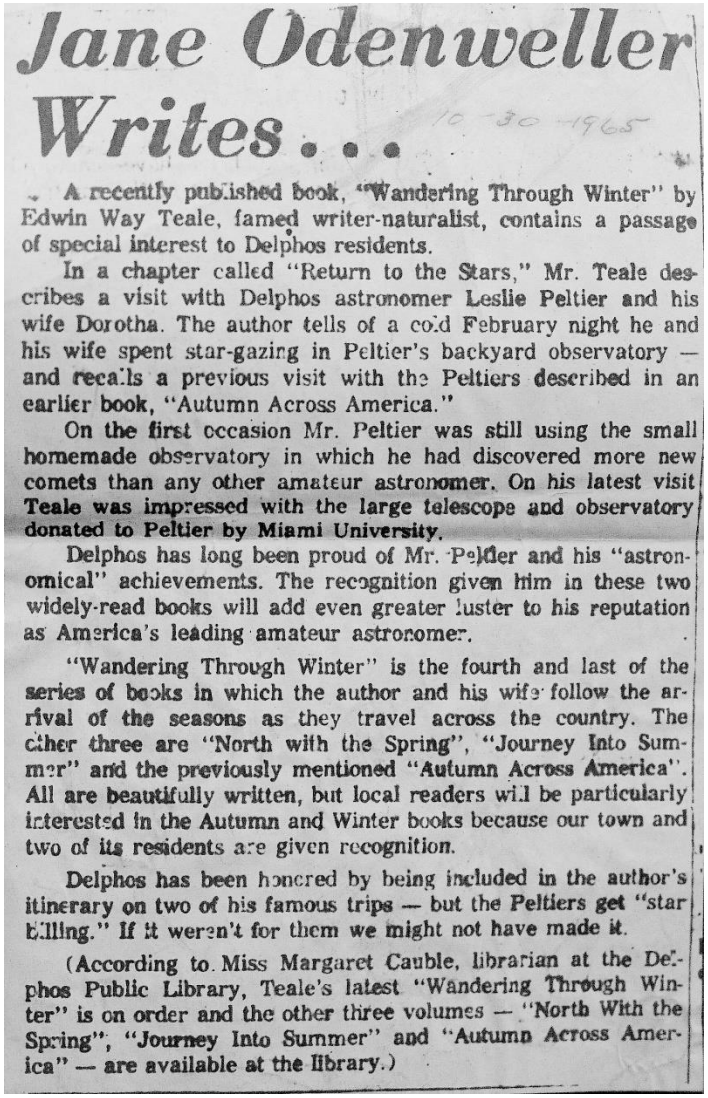
Two noteworthy friends were Don and Carolyn Hurless from the next town over. Fellow AAVSO members and stargazers, Don and Carolyn took great pride in helping with the menial tasks.

Don and Carolyn Hurless

Carolyn, who had built her own telescope when she was a teenager, would go on to become a proficient variable star gazer and an important part of the AAVSO legacy through Leslie's mentorship. CHOICE Ω







Jane Odenweller Writes . . .

10-30-1965

A recently published book, "Wandering Through Winter" by Edwin Way Teale, famed writer-naturalist, contains a passage of special interest to Delphos residents.

In a chapter called "Return to the Stars," Mr. Teale describes a visit with Delphos astronomer Leslie Peltier and his wife Dorotha. The author tells of a cold February night he and his wife spent star-gazing in Peltier's backyard observatory — and recalls a previous visit with the Peltiers described in an earlier book, "Autumn Across America."

On the first occasion Mr. Peltier was still using the small homemade observatory in which he had discovered more new comets than any other amateur astronomer. On his latest visit Teale was impressed with the large telescope and observatory donated to Peltier by Miami University.

Delphos has long been proud of Mr. Peltier and his "astronomical" achievements. The recognition given him in these two widely-read books will add even greater luster to his reputation as America's leading amateur astronomer.

"Wandering Through Winter" is the fourth and last of the series of books in which the author and his wife follow the arrival of the seasons as they travel across the country. The other three are "North with the Spring", "Journey Into Summer" and the previously mentioned "Autumn Across America". All are beautifully written, but local readers will be particularly interested in the Autumn and Winter books because our town and two of its residents are given recognition.

Delphos has been honored by being included in the author's itinerary on two of his famous trips — but the Peltiers get "star billing." If it weren't for them we might not have made it.

(According to Miss Margaret Cauble, librarian at the Delphos Public Library, Teale's latest "Wandering Through Winter" is on order and the other three volumes — "North With the Spring", "Journey Into Summer" and "Autumn Across America" — are available at the library.)

It was on this second visit that not only would they get to see the stars through the legendary Comet Seeker from the Merry-Go-Round observatory, but also view the cosmos from the very impressive 12-inch Clark refractor inside it's grand observatory.

Teal would encourage Leslie to write of his history with the stars. He believed that people would be interested in Leslie's life story. After that visit Leslie began thinking about what he would write. A couple years later Leslie submitted his draft to the publishing company of Harper and Row of New York. And in 1965 they released Leslie's first and greatest writing…

"Starlight Nights the Adventure of a Star Gazer." Ω

Teale wrote of his second visit with Leslie…

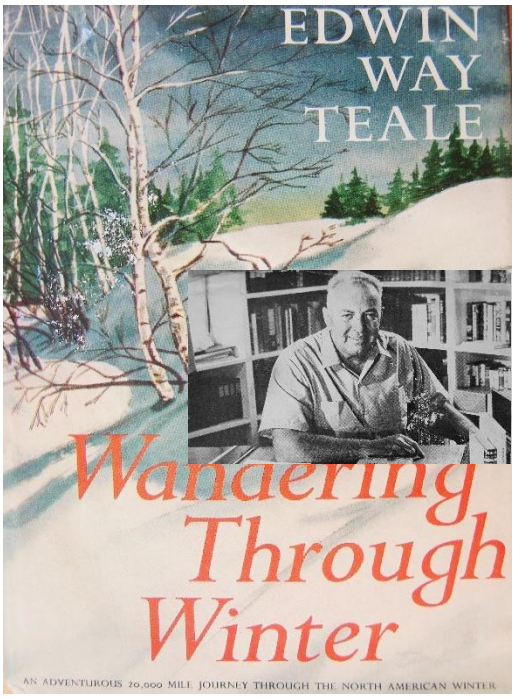
…it's been roughly ten years

since Edwin Way Teale and his wife Nellie passed through Delphos on their previous 20,000-mile journey. Four journeys in all produced the author's Seasons Across America book series.

Their last visit with Leslie and Dottie was in the Fall. Excited to meet the legendary comet hunter they spent an evening eating supper and musing over their shared experience of picking strawberries at two cents a quart to get enough money for Leslie to buy his first telescope and Edwin his first camera. After supper Leslie took them to his Merry-Go-Round observatory and Comet Seeker.

Cloud cover however prevented them from enjoying the experience and they left Delphos that evening to continue their trip now having made new friends.

It would not be until the early 1960s that they would visit again.



Photos and texts of Edwin Way Teale and his books are courtesy of the University of Connecticut

By sunset, in great elation, we saw the whole sky swept clear of clouds. A night of crystalline brilliance followed—a single star-filled night in two weeks or more of cloudy weather.

When we turned into the drive leading to Peltier's home, we found a dramatic change. His fifteen-dollar observatory—the small rotating box in which he had discovered more new comets than any other amateur astronomer in America—was now overshadowed by the immense mushroom of a white dome rising almost as high as the treetops. Complete with a twelve-inch Clark refracting telescope, the big observatory—worth, literally, a thousand times the homemade comet-hunting box nearby—had been presented to Peltier as a gift in recognition of his accomplishments. Thus, in this one back yard in northwestern Ohio, America's largest and smallest private observatories stand side by side.

In the cold stillness of the night, bundled up in heavy clothing, we all walked out to the twin observatories. The white dome of the larger building loomed up in the starlight. Behind it, a pale cone of illumination lifted high in the western sky. Peltier pointed it out and my mind went back to the Green Flash Nellie and I had seen at the Silver Strand. For this nebulous glow was another celestial phenomenon we had never observed before. It was the zodiacal light that is noticed on infrequent occasions in the eastern sky before dawn and in the western sky after twilight. Sunshine reflected from swarms of tiny meteoroids in outer space is believed to be the source of the long-mysterious illumination. This faint, wedged-shaped glow in the sky is most often seen in the east in September, and in the west in winter, during the months of February and March.

Within the dark, cavernous interior of the big observatory, where our footsteps echoed hollowly, Peltier switched on the dull-red glow of a night light over a table littered with star charts and notebooks. Gradually our eyes became accustomed to the gloom. We could make out the heavy mass of the central pier of concrete on which the telescope is mounted. In the stillness we heard the steady ticking of a clock. It was part of the synchronized mechanism that automatically swings the telescope in time with the apparent movement of the stars.

Near the door, Peltier pulled down on a heavy rope. High above us, with a creaking rumble of rollers, the cover slid back from a long rectangular opening in the rounded roof of the observatory. Starlight flooded in. Against this narrow rectangle of glittering, burning stars, the black tube of the telescope stood out in silhouette.

Now nearly a century old, this tube and the lenses it contains were the product of the famous Cambridgeport, Massachusetts, firm of Alvan Clark and Sons. In American astronomy, a Clark telescope has the standing of a Rolls-Royce among motor-cars. This particular instrument was made in 1868 for the Van Vleck Observatory at Wesleyan University, in Middletown, Connecticut. In 1923, when it was replaced by a twenty-inch refractor, it was sold to Miami University, in Oxford, Ohio. There it was used for nearly forty years. When astronomy courses were abandoned, the university presented the telescope, the building and several smaller instruments to Peltier in an outright gift. From end to end, the tube of the big telescope measures sixteen feet. The concrete pier on which it is mounted weighs a ton, and the revolving dome above it weighs two and a half tons. Depending on the eyepiece employed, the instrument magnifies celestial images from 150 to 600 times.

"What would you like to see first?" Peltier asked us.

Our choice was the same:

"The stars of Orion."

In how many far-separated places—beside the sea, in the desert, among the mountains, on the shores of forest lakes—had we gazed upward at this favorite constellation of ours. It was the nighttime companion of our winter travels. Dominating the evening heavens from December to April, it is the

most brilliant constellation in the sky. No other grouping of the stars can be confused with it. Like the giraffe among animals, the praying mantis among insects, the jack-in-the-pulpit among wildflowers, it is distinctive. Orion is familiar even to those who have never heard its name.

Now, one after another, we examined the component parts of the sword and belt. We saw the individual images of the stars magnified hundreds of times. Here was the blue-white brilliance of Rigel, thought to be a star in its prime. Here was the red of Betelgeuse, believed to be nearing the end of its immeasurable span of life. Here, at the center of the sword, was the Great Nebula of Orion, a mass of glowing gas sixteen light-years in diameter.

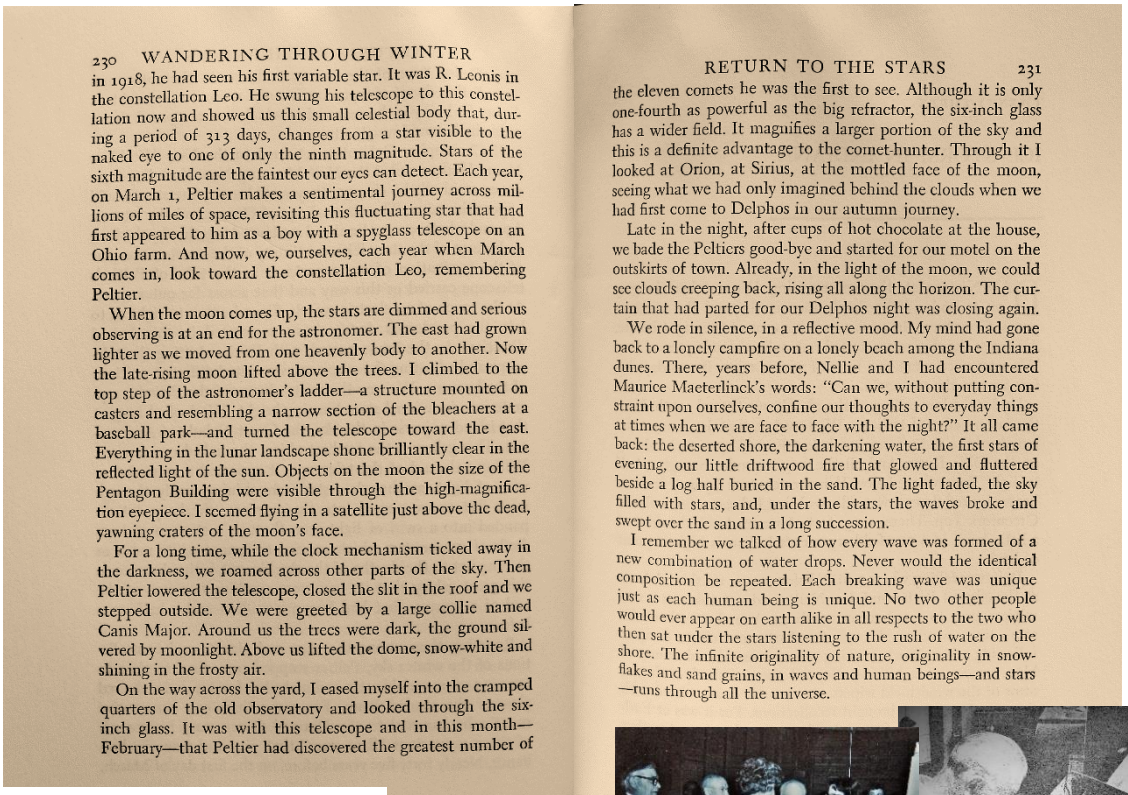
From Orion we swung to the brightest star in the sky, Sirius, in nearby Canis Major. If Sirius occupied the position of the sun in our solar system, its brilliance would appear to us to be thirty times as great. It has three times the sun's weight and twenty-seven times its volume. The beams that reached us from this first-magnitude star had traveled eight and eight-tenths years. This is a comparatively short time as celestial journeys go. Yet during that period man had entered the adventurous uncertainties of the Space Age. We wondered—as all who sweep their telescopes back and forth across the night sky must—what profound changes would occur before the rays that were beginning their journey even while we watched would reach other telescopes nearly a decade hence.

About the time the instrument through which we looked was being made at Cambridgeport, the largest refracting telescope attempted up to that time was completed by the Clarks. To test the quality of the image produced by its eighteen-and-a-half-inch lens, Alvan Graham Clark, the elder of the two sons, trained the new telescope on the brightest star in the heavens. As a result, his were the first human eyes to see the form of a faint companion star that revolves about Sirius approximately once in fifty years. This discovery solved the mystery of certain irregularities in the path of our brightest

star. Called "one of the strangest objects in the entire universe," this dwarf companion is only 1/10,000 as bright as Sirius. So heavy is the material of which it is composed that a cubic inch would weigh a ton.

If Christopher Columbus returned to the New World or Henry Hudson sailed the *Half Moon* up New York Bay once more, amid all the changes they would meet, the stars would appear the same. The classical age of Greece and the Atomic Age and whatever ages lie ahead are bound together by the long endurance of the stars. This continuity of the heavens was part of the fascination of our experience as the tube of Peltier's telescope carried us this way and that across far outer space. At the touch of an electric switch, flipped either to right or to left, the ponderous dome above us rotated in the desired direction. As the hours passed, with Peltier shifting the telescope and adjusting the eyepieces, we visited different portions of the heavens. We saw the misty cluster of the Pleiades separate into individual stars burning bright. We looked long at that island universe in the sky, the Great Nebula of Andromeda. This galaxy is the farthest object the naked eye can see. Without the aid of the telescope, it appeared a mere dot or wisp of light, as though a star were shining wanly through mist. But as we peered into the eyepiece, the hazy dot expanded into a swirl of light seen through a stratum of hundreds of nearer stars which seemed to form a white mesh or shining net in the depths of the sky. So vast is the distance to this great galaxy that its rays were reaching our eyes at the end of a journey that had begun a million and a half years before.

Roaming thus among the stars and planets and constellations of the winter sky, Peltier stopped from time to time to examine some variable star and make brief notes under the red glow of the shaded lamp. For more than 500 consecutive months he has sent to the Harvard Observatory his records of these mysterious "flare stars" that wax and wane in brilliance. Nearly forty-five years before, on the first day of March,



230 WANDERING THROUGH WINTER

in 1918, he had seen his first variable star. It was R. Leonis in the constellation Leo. He swung his telescope to this constellation now and showed us this small celestial body that, during a period of 313 days, changes from a star visible to the naked eye to one of only the ninth magnitude. Stars of the sixth magnitude are the faintest our eyes can detect. Each year, on March 1, Peltier makes a sentimental journey across millions of miles of space, revisiting this fluctuating star that had first appeared to him as a boy with a spyglass telescope on an Ohio farm. And now, we, ourselves, each year when March comes in, look toward the constellation Leo, remembering Peltier.

When the moon comes up, the stars are dimmed and serious observing is at an end for the astronomer. The east had grown lighter as we moved from one heavenly body to another. Now the late-rising moon lifted above the trees. I climbed to the top step of the astronomer's ladder—a structure mounted on casters and resembling a narrow section of the bleachers at a baseball park—and turned the telescope toward the east. Everything in the lunar landscape shone brilliantly clear in the reflected light of the sun. Objects on the moon the size of the Pentagon Building were visible through the high-magnification eyepiece. I seemed flying in a satellite just above the dead, yawning craters of the moon's face.

For a long time, while the clock mechanism ticked away in the darkness, we roamed across other parts of the sky. Then Peltier lowered the telescope, closed the slit in the roof and we stepped outside. We were greeted by a large collie named Canis Major. Around us the trees were dark, the ground silvered by moonlight. Above us lifted the dome, snow-white and shining in the frosty air.

On the way across the yard, I eased myself into the cramped quarters of the old observatory and looked through the six-inch glass. It was with this telescope and in this month—February—that Peltier had discovered the greatest number of

RETURN TO THE STARS 231

the eleven comets he was the first to see. Although it is only one-fourth as powerful as the big refractor, the six-inch glass has a wider field. It magnifies a larger portion of the sky and this is a definite advantage to the comet-hunter. Through it I looked at Orion, at Sirius, at the mottled face of the moon, seeing what we had only imagined behind the clouds when we had first come to Delphos in our autumn journey.

Late in the night, after cups of hot chocolate at the house, we bade the Peltiers good-bye and started for our motel on the outskirts of town. Already, in the light of the moon, we could see clouds creeping back, rising all along the horizon. The curtain that had parted for our Delphos night was closing again.

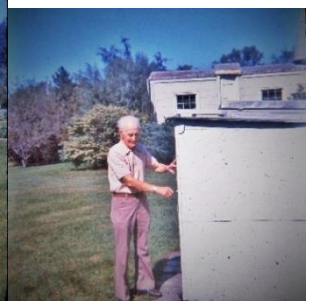
We rode in silence, in a reflective mood. My mind had gone back to a lonely campfire on a lonely beach among the Indiana dunes. There, years before, Nellie and I had encountered Maurice Maeterlinck's words: "Can we, without putting constraint upon ourselves, confine our thoughts to everyday things at times when we are face to face with the night?" It all came back: the deserted shore, the darkening water, the first stars of evening, our little driftwood fire that glowed and fluttered beside a log half buried in the sand. The light faded, the sky filled with stars, and, under the stars, the waves broke and swept over the sand in a long succession.

I remember we talked of how every wave was formed of a new combination of water drops. Never would the identical composition be repeated. Each breaking wave was unique just as each human being is unique. No two other people would ever appear on earth alike in all respects to the two who then sat under the stars listening to the rush of water on the shore. The infinite originality of nature, originality in snowflakes and sand grains, in waves and human beings—and stars—runs through all the universe.

The Golden Age

Ω

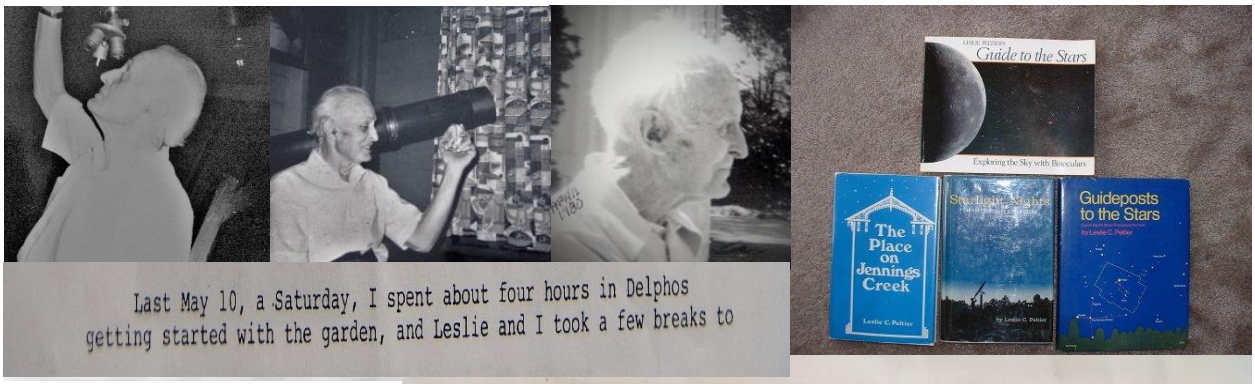
"The final days of Leslie and his observatories"



…the mountain and the squirrel

is how Leslie referred to his observatories in "*Starlight Nights*." As the years passed so did their Golden Age. Yet like a master violinist, Leslie played the 12-inch Clark and the 6-inch Comet Seeker with great knowledge and passion.

Leslie would write other books in his final years sharing with us how to observe the night sky and of his beloved Brookhaven.



Last May 10, a Saturday, I spent about four hours in Delphos getting started with the garden, and Leslie and I took a few breaks to discuss crops and world events. I left at about 5:15 pm and Leslie continued working. He passed away about 9 pm, back by the observatory, while working near the garden.

Carolyn Hurless
on Leslie's passing May 10, 1980

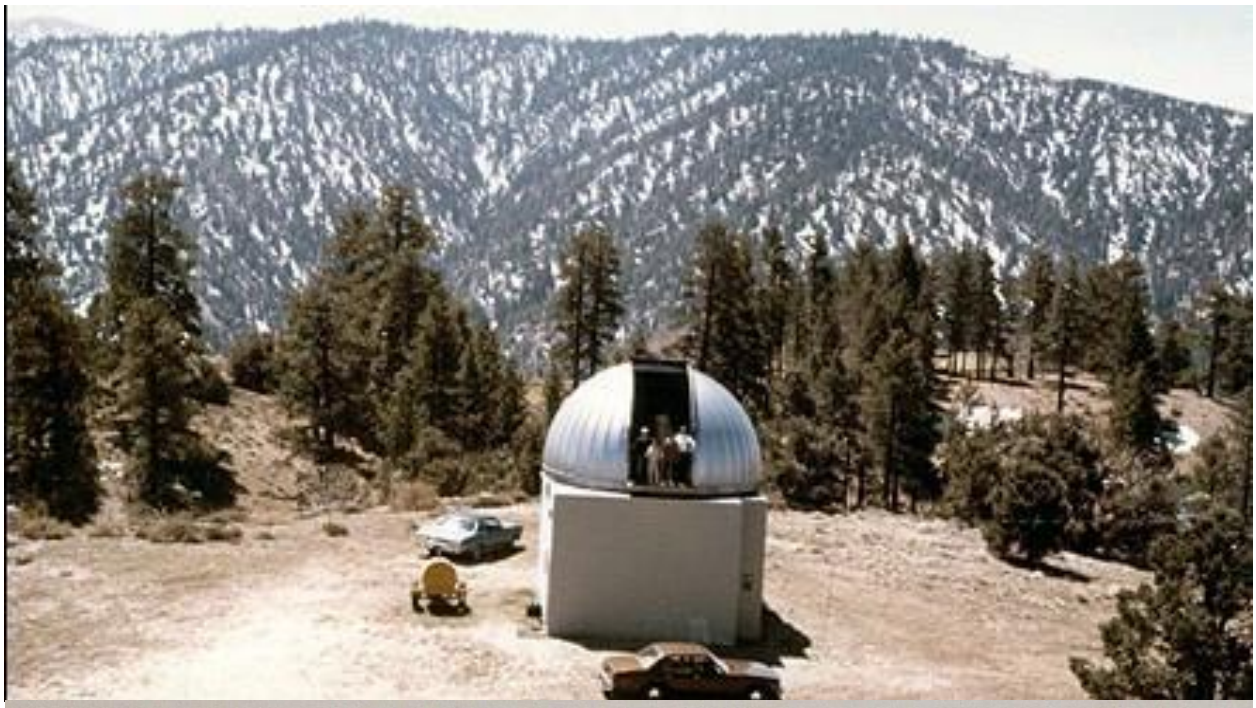
Beyond repair the observatory was torn down

When Leslie passed, Dottie was unable to take care of all that was Brookhaven. The Merry-Go-Round was removed 12 years later and the 12-inch Clark was dismantled after that. Someone had stolen the brass focuser to the 12-inch. The Clark objective lens is safe with the family. All that remains now are the trees that Leslie planted and the concrete pier behind them.

Ω

TIME CAPSULES *with Leslie C. Peltier*

Dr. Roger Kolman remembers…



Ford Observatory dedication, 1965

We had learned that there was going to be a mountain near Wrightwood, California, named after Leslie Peltier, and an observatory placed on the mountain. The observatory was to be named after Clint Ford and would house an 18-inch telescope donated by Claude Carpenter. Once we were invited to the dedication, Dick Wend and I planned a western vacation.

We did a great deal of sightseeing on the way to Wrightwood.

Dick had been a long time member of the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers (ALPO), so he asked ALPO leader Walter Haas to set up a meeting in Las Cruces with Clyde Tombaugh on the way out to Mt. Peltier (Figure 5). I brought my 6-inch *f*/4 richest-field telescope (RFT) along so I would not miss any observing time. Upon arrival at the Tombaugh home, Clyde saw the 6-inch RFT in the back seat of Dick's car and got excited. "I haven't seen one of those since I made one in 1920-something." We then exchanged views through the 6-inch and Tombaugh's 16-inch telescope.

Tombaugh's telescope was a behemoth! It was of long focus, since he was a planetary observer. It looked like an oil derrick. Tombaugh wanted to show us Jupiter, which was not easily accessible to the eyepiece. Being very practical, he had a long plank near the observing platform. He pulled out the plank, and told Dick and me to stand on one end to weigh it down. He then walked out to the end of the plank to reach the eyepiece and observe. When he was done, he walked back and said, "Okay, now it's your turn." Dick and Clyde stood on the end of the plank to weigh it down for me. Now, I was much skinnier then, but it was still pretty scary. However, this was a chance to observe with Clyde Tombaugh, so I wasn't about to chicken-out. After I finished, Clyde and I stood on the plank for Dick. Another interesting tidbit is the fact that Tombaugh, being the practical man he was, used a peanut butter jar for the secondary cover, and a garbage can lid for the mirror cover.

Left to Right: Dr. Roger Kolman AAVSO, Clyde Tombaugh discoverer of Pluto and Dick Wend AAVSO and ALPO Photo from their 1965 trip to Mt. Peltier Ω

We arrived a few days before the dedication and found that there was much to do before the site would be suitable for visitors. We pitched in to help with the preparations. While cleaning up things, Dick called out to me, "What kind of snake is this?" There was a rattler coiled up in front of him. Fortunately, I had been a pitcher on my high school baseball team. I told him to stand very still, picked up a rock, and sent the snake to its maker. We threw the snake off the side of the mountain. Later, when we told the story to Larry Bornhurst (one of the Ford Observatory group), he said, "So where are the rattles? You didn't save the rattles? My kids are saving them!"

There were no "facilities" available, but bizarre as it may seem, there was a toilet just sitting there in the middle of the observing field on top of the mountain! So we fashioned a porta-potty out of some leftover plywood and made a sign: one side said "Be careful, in use"; the other side said, "It's Okay now."

Mountain bears his name

Declared the "world's greatest amateur astronomer, Leslie Peltier, also has a mountain named after him.

The 7,500-foot mountain, located in the San Gabriel range in California, was named Mount Peltier in 1965.

Atop the mountain is an observatory, with an 18-inch telescope, a 20-foot dome and living quarters. It is called Ford Observatory, named after Clinton Ford, one of the members of what has been named the Mt. Peltier Association.

The observatory is operated by the association, of which Peltier was an honorary member.

Association members in 1965 included Thomas Cragg, the only professional astronomer. He is with the famed Mt. Wilson observatory. Others are Larry Bornhurst and Ernest Lorenz, well known amateur astronomers.

The U.S. Department of the Interior, which cooperated in the project, has built an all-weather road to the top of the mountain.

The area is 100 miles from Los Angeles. The closest municipality is Wrightwood, a California ski resort.

Just to the north of Mt. Peltier is the Mohave Desert.

Leslie Peltier

The world's greatest amateur astronomer, Leslie Peltier of Del-
phos, is being honored by having a mountain named after him.

Delphos Man Gives Name To Mountain

A 7,500 - foot mountain in California will bear the name Mt. Peltier for Delphos amateur astronomer Leslie C. Peltier.

The newest honor accorded Peltier was revealed Sunday evening by solar astronomer Thomas Cragg of Mt. Wilson and Mt. Palomar observatories. Cragg was in Lima for dedication of the new Schoonover Observatory.

An observatory is being constructed through private donations on Peltier Mountain, about 50 feet below the summit, and will be named the Ford Observatory in honor of noted variable star observer, Clinton Ford of Wilton, Mass. Ford also was in Lima for the dedication.

Mount Peltier, located about 100 miles east of Mt. Wilson in the San Gabriel range near San Bernardino, "has greater potential than Mt. Wilson," Cragg maintained.

The 60 - year - old Peltier was chosen by his colleagues for his contributions in the field of astronomy. "You may not be aware of it," Ford explained, "but Mr. Peltier is probably the most famous amateur astronomer in the world."

Peltier credited with discovery of 12 comets — the first on May 14, 1936, which bears his name. Peltier has made more than 118,000 observations of variable stars in his 45 years' amateur study.

Employed as a toy designer at the Delphos Bending Machine Co., Peltier continues to spend two hours nightly in his observatory, located at his home near Delphos.

At Mt. Peltier variable stars will be studied, Cragg said Sunday. The Ford Observatory is expected to be completed in about one year and the telescope, an 18 - inch reflector, already has been donated by astronomer Claude Carpenter, a long-time friend of Peltier.

LESLIE C. PELTIER
...Mountain Namesake

The 5,000 - acre area was leased from the government, Cragg said, and could be the finest observation site in the world.

"Astronomical conditions are excellent," Ford added. "The air is very dry, percentage of clear nights great and unlike, Mt. Wilson, there are not the bright lights of Los Angeles nearby. In addition, the telephone company has a relay station nearby and water and power facilities are available.

Cragg commented that the observatory for "amateurs will be operated like a professional one," and will be employed to study the stars whose light changes sometimes over a period of hour, days, weeks or years. More than 20,000 variable stars exist, and mostly amateur astronomers are involved in their study. Findings, however, are reported to professional astronomers who continue with the investigations.

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TIME CAPSULES *with Leslie C. Peltier*

Walter Scott Houston remembers…

1968 AAVSO Lima, Ohio

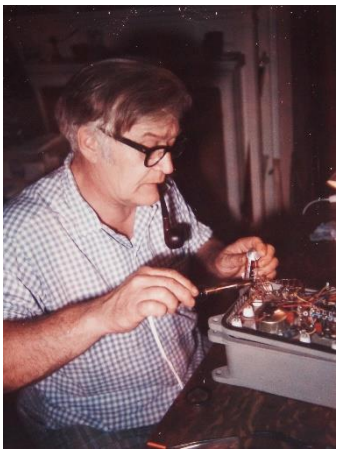
…. or Scotty as his friends called him

became a famous educator and commentator of the stars. The celestial kind that is.

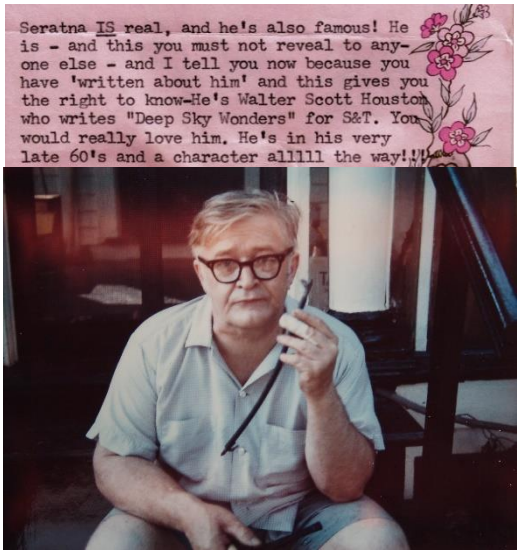
Old school and resourceful in many ways, Scotty was among the youngest and last of the Leslie Peltier generation that viewed the night sky with a wonder and purity that seems to have been lost to the generations of our day with laptop astrophotography, Wi Fi mounts and GPS polar alignment.

A time when there was nothing an astronomer needed to jiggle or to fix electronically but their gaze upon a beautiful, celestial object.

From his country home in Haddam, Connecticut, overlooking the Connecticut river, Scotty educated and entertained countless of astronomy enthusiasts with his wit, knowledge and push button typewriter as a popular columnist for *Sky and Telescope* magazine.



Scotty would tinker some and spend time in his homemade observatory with family and friends.



Scotty's homemade letterhead

Scotty's unfinished observatory dedication

Scotty at his finished observatory

Scotty, a longtime member of the AAVSO would attend various meetings that were held throughout the U. S. and visit with longtime AAVSO friends and members such as Leslie Peltier at his home and observatories in Delphos, Ohio Ω

1968 Leslie with his Strawberry Spyglass in front of the 12-inch Clark. This photo sums up Leslie's entire history from beginning to end.

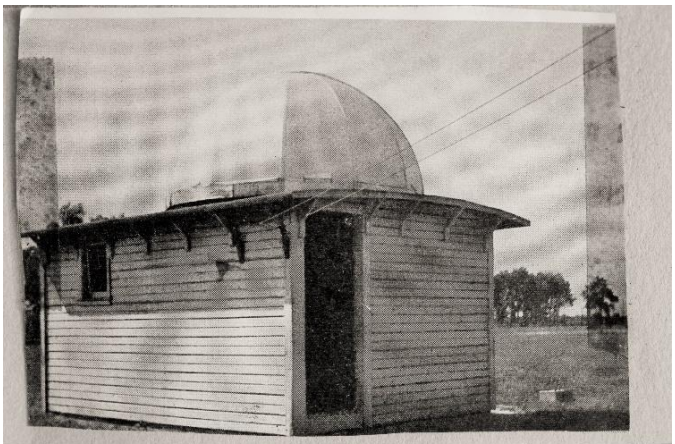
1968 This historic photo was taken at the time the black and white photo was taken.
This color photo was taken of Scotty observing Leslie with his Strawberry Spyglass, the 6-inch Fitz inside the Merry-Go-Round and the 12-inch Clark inside its grand observatory.
Fifty-two years had passed since Leslie first began using his Spyglass and 38 years since Scotty first met Leslie.

…Scotty remembers meeting Leslie in 1932

Scotty had nearly a five-decade history with Leslie, before Leslie's passing, that intersected from time to time beginning in the spring of 1932.

Scotty tells his story of meeting the famous Leslie Peltier in the forward of the fourth and final book Leslie had written… "*Leslie Peltier's Guide to the Stars,*" Exploring the Sky with Binoculars…

"Our big Packard twisted into the driveway of just another Midwestern farm house, squatting like all of them on the glacial-drifted Ohio farmland. A couple of cows grazed in the yard, a Model T sagged behind the house, and a board gave passage over a muddy spot in the yard.



THROUGH HIS TELESCOPE in this home-made observatory in Delphos, Ohio, five new comets and a star have been discovered by L. C. Peltier, a draftsman for Delphos Bending Co., world's largest manufacturer of automobile bows, window mouldings and other bent wood products. Peltier's boyhood interest in science and nature study impelled him in 1916 to buy a small telescope and mount it on a crude tripod in his back yard. Then he joined the American Assn. of Variable Star Observers and began making systematic observations. In 1920 Harvard College Observatory lent him a four-inch telescope and later Princeton University offered him a six-inch refractor designed for comet seeking. With this instrument, permanently mounted in his observatory, he found not only the new comet recently publicized in the newspapers but also four others and the star Nova Ophiuchi.

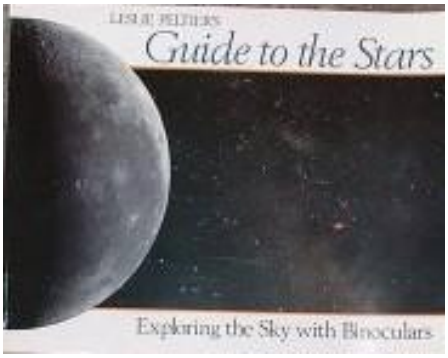
The plank-assisted path led into the nearby pasture, and in that pasture, was a marvelous sight – a ten-by-ten-foot frame shed with a dome on top. We had reached, for us at any rate, one of the shrines of the world – the amateur observatory of Leslie C. Peltier. And it was sort of symbolic that the town was called Delphos, the ancient source of revelation.

A slim, quiet man, hardly older than I, greeted us. A vibrant sister Dorothy made the smiling welcome, and, as was customary in the Midwest, we entered through the kitchen door. None of us had seen the other before but we embraced a mutual hobby – we observed variable stars. Ω

This was my introduction to Leslie Peltier, who at the age of 32 was established as America's leading amateur astronomer. Eventually he was to become even more luminous than he was that spring day in 1932. But already he had racked up two comets or so, three novae, and more variable star observations than anyone else in the country.

Not long before he died in 1980, we talked of Halley's Comet, which he had seen in 1910. He desperately wanted to see it in 1985, and he knew he would not. Thus, he told me, he was writing a legacy for the next generation. The coming return of Halley, he pointed out, would sell thousands of telescopes to people who otherwise would never have bought them. What attic would embalm them once the comet was long gone?

He told me of a book that might keep many of the telescopes active, available to the young as well as the old. It would be disaster to turn them over to the spiders in the attic.



"*Leslie Peltier's Guide to the Stars"* is that book.

The country supper food was good but I do not remember a dish. It was clear outside, and we would be able to observe that night and match our newly acquired observational skills against the Master of them all. We would take turns estimating the exact brightness of perhaps four dozen variable stars.

If you do not know about them, variable stars change their brightness with time. The variation is periodic for some, ranging from less than a day to over 1,000 days. Some nights, binoculars will show the variable; other nights it might take a 20-inch telescope to see the star at minimum light. You can chart these stars and measure the brightness of the stars around them to make a comparison scale. Then on any night you simply compare the variable with the comparison scale and estimate its brightness.

Founders of the American Association of Variable Star Observers held first Harvard College Observatory meeting of the organization in November, 1915. (Top row, left to right) A. R. Burbeck, 1st treasurer; David B. Pickering, 1st president; Solon I. Bailey; W. T. Olcott, 1st secretary. (Middle row, left to right) F. H. Spinney; C. Y. McAteer; E. C. Pickering, founder; G. F. Nolty. (Front row, on walk, left to right) Rev. T. C. H. Bouton; Leon Campbell, 1st recorder; J. L. Stewart. Members were posing on steps of Observatory's Building "A", which housed AAVSO for nearly half a century. (AAVSO Photo)

1915 Founders of the American Association of Variable Star Observers Harvard College Observatory

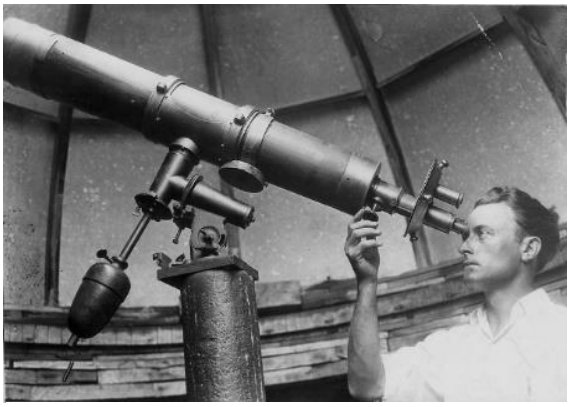
Amateur astronomers since the 1860s have found variables fascinating, and because many of them were within reach of even 3-inch telescopes, the hobby was affordable. By the 1880s magazines were printing these observations. Professor Pickering at Harvard encouraged this amateur work, and he even let some money slip out to help them. He saw it as a way to collect needed data that professional astronomers simply did not have the time to gather.

By 1911 so many amateurs were sending results to Pickering that the American Association of Variable Star Observers was formed. It is now simply called the AAVSO and makes a powerful symbiosis with the professional astronomical machine. Today satellite observing schedules are determined from data collected by the AAVSO members. Ω

Peltier joined the AAVSO in 1918, so on that night in 1932 he had fourteen years of experience to my one year. We trudged out that night under skies that Delphos seldom has today. Up went a ladder, up went Peltier, and down was handed the dome slit cover. Farm boy as he was, there was no need for a fancy mechanism to take a cover off.

Inside sat a telescope, gleaming wood, that was already notable. The whim of a Princeton astronomer to loan him the scope shoved Peltier into the fast track to astronomical fame, a position he maintained with ease and distinguished style for the next half century.

At Princeton, it had captured three comets; Peltier had added three more. The names were deeply carved on its mahogany tube. It was a 6-inch, which was large for the AAVSO at that time. As we admired it Peltier noted that if it had been a non-comet telescope he probably would never have gone on to find his but would have stuck only to variables.



1930s Leslie at the 6-inch Comet Seeker inside the Cow Pasture observatory. This is where Scotty, spending time with Leslie, tested his observing skills against the master.

The observing session started as soon as it became really dark. We took turns estimating the brightness of variable after variable. Leslie found all the fields to speed things up. His scope had no finder; he merely looked along the tube, nudged the scope a trifle, then lo and behold, the variable would be in the eyepiece. He never was wrong! We had heard of this talent of his, but still it dazzled us.

Later after a ham and egg breakfast, and coffee with grounds, we compared the results of the observing session. I was no more than one-tenth of a magnitude off Peltier. Talk of mead and honey! To me it meant I had graduated, I had gotten around the last buoy in the race, my doubts about myself were quenched by a Peltier fire hose. A great adventure could now begin.

Scotty, Leslie and some AAVSOs at the home of Don and Carolyn Hurless

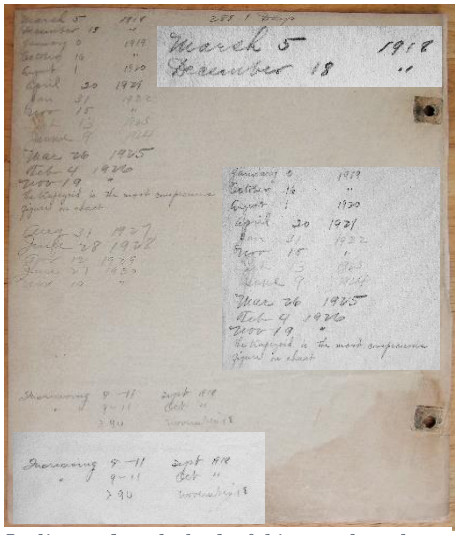
But while I was instantly grateful to Peltier, I did not realize that I was to be only one of many whom Leslie conducted quietly into what may be called significant activity in astronomy, activity that was a contribution to the world I played in.

I didn't dream that Leslie would send dozens of young people into professional astronomy. Some of them now man giant telescopes. More have found that serenity that marked Peltier and have learned that the stars are better than a witch doctor. Ω

First it was his example, his role model, then it was his book, *Starlight Nights*, which had the widest impact of any astronomy book since Garret P. Serviss wrote at the turn of the century. Perhaps time will show that Peltier did even more good.

Canny, shy, humble Leslie had special talents unteachable in school. A photographic memory let him remember accurately a star chart even with its comparison star magnitudes over a twenty-year span. He knew the names of all the craters on the Moon even though he made no attempt to memorize them.

Steeped in the 19th-century traditions of the naturalist, Leslie knew the names of all the birds and flowers. His notes record the aurora, the lightning strikes, and the first time each spring the Houstonia bloomed. As a grade school child, he carried a cyanide jar through the fields to collect butterflies. The culture of his time allowed this.



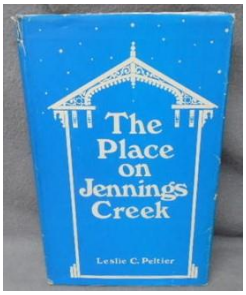
Leslie noted on the back of this star chart that he first observed the variable star T Geminorum on March 5th, 1918, four days after his very first variable star observation of R Leonis on March 1st, 1918 with the Strawberry Spyglass.

Like all naturalists, he learned to draw. But while his notes show beetles and birds, there are no planets on the pages. Although a superb observer, he had no concern with the physics of his equipment. His lively sense of invention was restricted to what a farm boy knew about – simple observatories, observing chairs (he worked in a furniture factory). No photometers for him.

He did like this life; he had done all the 19th-century things with tremendous success. And that brings up a point many will dispute. Farm boys were supposed to learn from books. Lincoln reading by candlelight was a powerful influence. And all the great naturalists he knew were also writers. Hence, he must be a writer, too. I once asked him which he was first, a writer or an amateur astronomer. His reply was quick. He was fundamentally a writer. His telescope was just a tool to collect material just as when younger he had collected rocks from the glacial drift.

Until *Variable Views* started reprinting them, few of Peltier's friends knew that he had published several dozen articles in magazines. They were conventional nature study. "Mythical Horse Hair Snakes," which appeared in *Nature* magazine in 1933 is a sample.

His problem was that he had not written a hardcover book. In 19th-century rural America a book was an important passport to lifelong social standing. That's how Thoreau and John Muir got famous. But astronomy books are hard sell to publishers. He envied his friend Edwin Way Teal who had published many books, and laments, "(Teal) authoring a score or more books; I had made no trail at all." Ω



But with the advent of his first book (*Starlight Nights)* all that changed; he had arrived. The success spurred him to (write) *The Place on Jennings Creek*, which is slowly carving a real niche for itself among the sensitive. Peltier's work will last, for he learned writing from real craftsmen. Thoreau runs alongside him in his imagery and sentence rhythms. Any writer who describes the last ice age as, "That famous dabbler in real estate the Great Ice Age," was well trained. His prose is effortless and reads like a flowing brook, sparkling with unexpected glints.

Dr. Lewis Epstein once told the Astronomical Society of the Pacific that the chief job of the astronomer has always been to insure the continuation of the attitudes that have made astronomy great. This is more important than making variable star or meteor observations, valuable as they are. My mail each month attests to the spur that Leslie's books, his example, and his personality have contributed to this influence.

Peltier that night did a good deal for my attitudes, and in return we invited him to continue with us to Maryland and the AAVSO spring meeting. He turned shy instantly and mumbled about his farm chores.

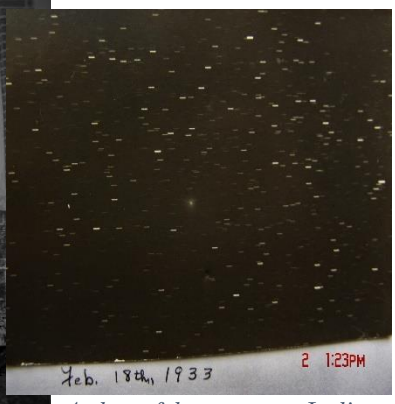
I turned to his sister Dorothy and asked, "we might mess up your kitchen maybe?" Her reply was a smiling, "I got a new clothesline out back. You can use that." Peltier went quietly.

The small convention was ecstatic when Peltier thus came to his first convention. He liked it too. It was his first chance to talk to observers he knew only by mail. All the way home to Delphos he kept smiling his small smile.

In fact, he was so pleased he then assaulted the heavens with redoubled efforts and in a few months – there was another comet discovered."

-Walter Scott Houston Ω

The 1932 AAVSO convention that Scotty and Leslie attended.
Scotty sitting bottom row right side on the end, Leslie standing top row second from the right



A photo of the next comet Leslie discovered after the 1932 Spring convention with Scotty Houston

THANK YOU!

"A very warm and special Thank You to those who have made available photos and information concerning Leslie's life story to share with future generations"

Delphos Canal Commission Museum

Peltier Gallery

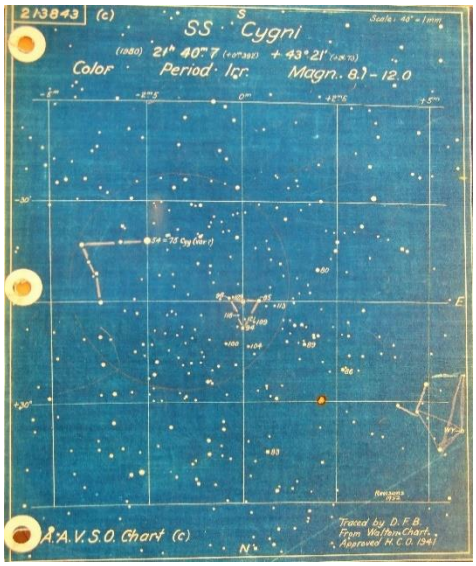
The Delphos Canal Commission Museum Delphos, Ohio is an outgrowth of a youth project put together in 1987 to raise a canal boat hull from the Miami and Erie Canal. Fifty-seven young people, ages nine through eighteen, under the direction of a twelve-year-old, obtained the necessary permits from the Ohio Land Office, raised the nearly five thousand dollars and found the extensive variety of equipment necessary to remove the hull and place it in storage. Now housed in a large, three-level building, the museum has many, many exhibits donated by the citizens to preserve Delphos history and is home to the Peltier Gallery displaying original photos, signed books and memorabilia. The museum operates solely from donations and still with volunteer help from the community.

The Allen County Museum

The Allen County Historical Society Lima, Ohio and Anna Selfridge Curator for sharing the best photo of Leslie at the 12-inch Clark refractor inside his McFarland observatory that is publicly available.

The AAVSO

1932 AAVSO meeting with Leslie & Scotty



1941 AAVSO blueprint variable star chart

The American Association of Variable Star Observers whom Leslie was a member beginning in 1918. An organization of professional and amateur astronomers dedicated to the science of our universe. Original photos and star charts were produced by the AAVSO and dedicated members over many, many years. Ω

THANK YOU!

Roger, Leslie and the Merry-Go-Round

Roger with Leslie Lima, Ohio

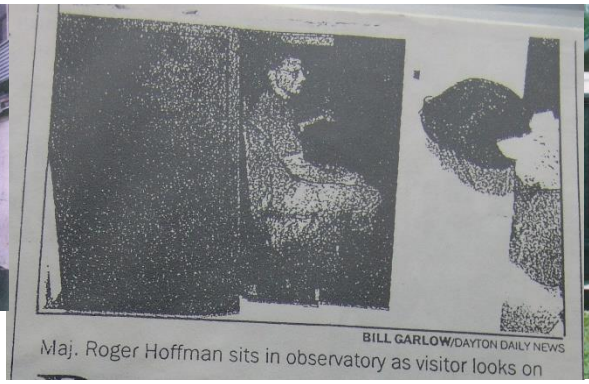
AAVSO gathering at the home of Carolyn Hurless Leslie with Dottie in the blue dress 1964

Dr. Roger Kolman

1st Vice President of the American Association of Variable Star Observers.

After a very enjoyable phone call, Roger forwarded many photos of his time with Leslie and the story of he with his friend and mentor Dick Wend paying a visit to Clyde Tombaugh, discoverer of Pluto, on their way to the dedication of Mt. Peltier in California.

1992 Merry-Go-Round rebuild



Major Roger Hoffman

After reading *Starlight Nights,* Roger wanted to see what had happened to the author and his observatories. Roger made a trip to Delphos and found that Leslie had been gone for 10 years and the observatories, because of weather decay, were beyond repair. Over time Roger was permitted to take the Merry-Go-Round observatory and restore and replace all that was needed to bring it back to life.

2016 Jason Prunty took this photo of the Moon through the Merry-Go-Round telescope with his smart phone

After the restoration and the premiere, the Merry-Go-Round has been maintained and cared for at the property of the John Bryan State Park Observatory Dayton, Ohio. Ω

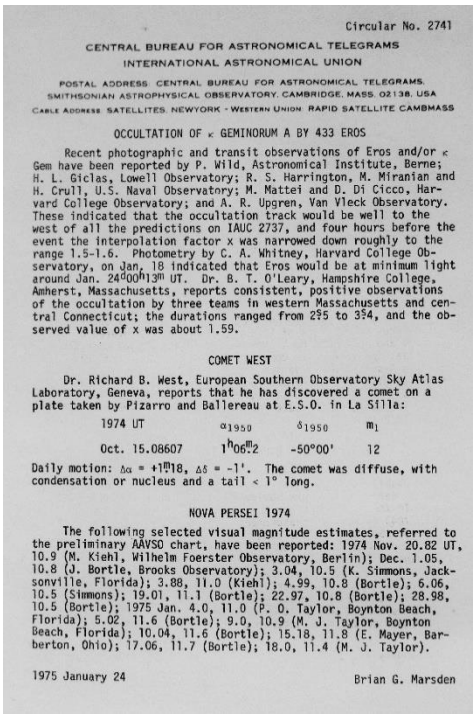
THANK YOU!

Photo courtesy of DavidCortner.com John Bortle with Leslie at Brookhaven 1973

***John E. Bortle** W. R. Brooks Observatory New York*

From time to time there will be a mention of Leslie on the CloudyNights.org website. The forums on this website are a mixed bag of knowledge and experience. However, one voice stands out, that of John E. Bortle who has a deep and experienced knowledge of our universe… search (***brooksobs)***

John provided the confirmation for the manufacturer of Leslie's 6-inch "Henry Fitz" Comet Seeker.



Circular No. 2741

CENTRAL BUREAU FOR ASTRONOMICAL TELEGRAMS
INTERNATIONAL ASTRONOMICAL UNION

POSTAL ADDRESS: CENTRAL BUREAU FOR ASTRONOMICAL TELEGRAMS, SMITHSONIAN ASTROPHYSICAL OBSERVATORY, CAMBRIDGE, MASS. 02138, U.S.A.
CABLE ADDRESS: SATELLITES NEWYORK - WESTERN UNION RAPID SATELLITE CAMBMASS

OCCULTATION OF κ GEMINORUM A BY 433 EROS

Recent photographic and transit observations of Eros and/or κ Gem have been reported by P. Wild, Astronomical Institute, Berne; H. L. Giclas, Lowell Observatory; R. S. Harrington, M. Miranian and H. Crull, U.S. Naval Observatory; M. Mattei and D. Di Cicco, Harvard College Observatory; and A. R. Upgren, Van Vleck Observatory. These indicated that the occultation track would be well to the west of all the predictions on IAUC 2737, and four hours before the event the interpolation factor x was narrowed down roughly to the range 1.5-1.6. Photometry by C. A. Whitney, Harvard College Observatory, on Jan. 18 indicated that Eros would be at minimum light around Jan. $24^{d}00^{h}13^{m}$ UT. Dr. B. T. O'Leary, Hampshire College, Amherst, Massachusetts, reports consistent, positive observations of the occultation by three teams in western Massachusetts and central Connecticut; the durations ranged from $2^{s}5$ to $3^{s}4$, and the observed value of x was about 1.59.

COMET WEST

Dr. Richard B. West, European Southern Observatory Sky Atlas Laboratory, Geneva, reports that he has discovered a comet on a plate taken by Pizarro and Ballereau at E.S.O. in La Silla:

1974 UT	α_{1950}	δ_{1950}	m_1
Oct. 15.08607	$1^{h}06^{m}2$	-50°00'	12

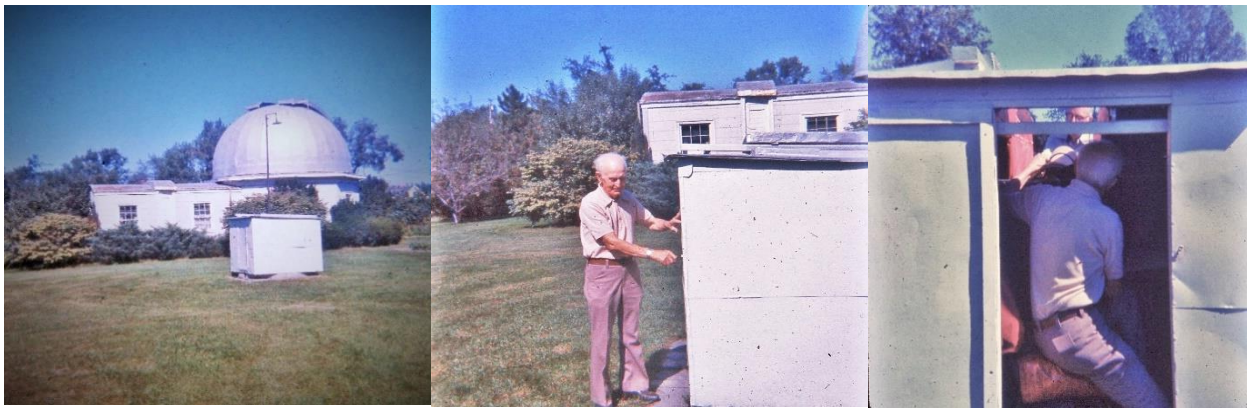
Daily motion: $\Delta\alpha = +1^{m}18$, $\Delta\delta = -1'$. The comet was diffuse, with condensation or nucleus and a tail < 1° long.

NOVA PERSEI 1974

The following selected visual magnitude estimates, referred to the preliminary AAVSO chart, have been reported: 1974 Nov. 20.82 UT, 10.9 (M. Kiehl, Wilhelm Foerster Observatory, Berlin); Dec. 1.05, 10.8 (J. Bortle, Brooks Observatory); 3.04, 10.5 (K. Simmons, Jacksonville, Florida); 3.88, 11.0 (Kiehl); 4.99, 10.8 (Bortle); 6.06, 10.5 (Simmons); 19.01, 11.1 (Bortle); 22.97, 10.8 (Bortle); 28.98, 10.5 (Bortle); 1975 Jan. 4.0, 11.0 (P. O. Taylor, Boynton Beach, Florida); 5.02, 11.6 (Bortle); 9.0, 10.9 (M. J. Taylor, Boynton Beach, Florida); 10.04, 11.6 (Bortle); 15.18, 11.8 (E. Mayer, Barberton, Ohio); 17.06, 11.7 (Bortle); 18.0, 11.4 (M. J. Taylor).

1975 January 24 Brian G. Marsden

John Bortle's 1974 observations of Nova Persei



Bob Ebbeskotte

A resident of Delphos, Ohio and a member on the Board of Directors for the Delphos Canal Commission Museum. Bob shares these photos from his collection with us of Leslie around his observatories in the last years. Bob also prizes his signed copies of Starlight Nights and The Place on Jennings Creek. After discovering who Leslie was, he also realized that his family had farmed the same ground that use to be the old Peltier farm.

Bob gives us a tour of the museum Ω

THANK YOU!

Brad's last name and address are left out to protect the privacy of his family

Brad of Delphos

After discovering a 1940s-newspaper article that gave the address of the 2nd rental home that Leslie would be moving to and that witnessed 3 comets with the Merry-Go-Round, I payed a visit and was greeted by a friendly homeowner.

I began by telling him where I was from and asked if he had ever heard of Leslie Peltier. The home owner invited me into his home and began to tell me how he remembered seeing the observatory over at the old Peltier place when he was a kid. Sitting in the living room I showed him the old newspaper article on my laptop and that Leslie had once lived in his home. We talked for a few minutes and then I asked if I could see the back yard. He grabbed his coat and led me through his beautiful home to the back door. I explained that Leslie once had an observatory in the backyard. We talked for another 15 minutes before I left. I love hometown hospitality and the "Friendliest City in America."

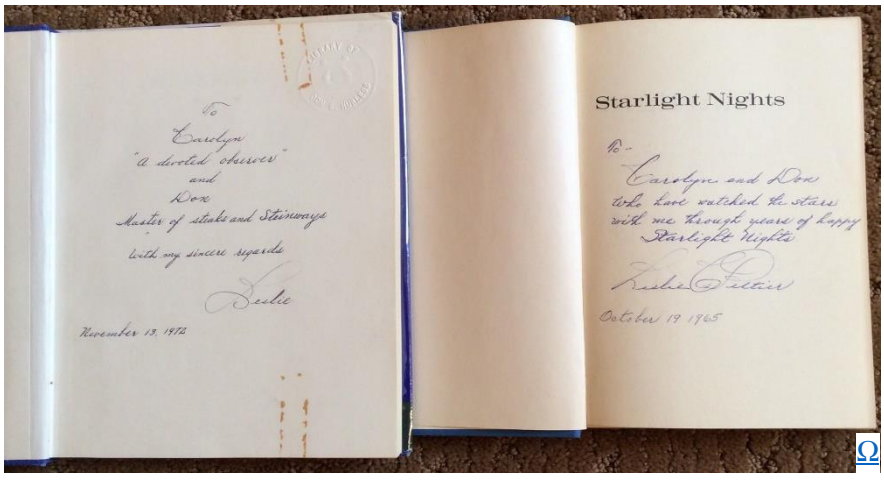
Friend and Mentor

John Stallkamp

It was late Summer in 1998. A group of us went to John's home for a meteor shower party. Located in the country we all were excited as we drove down the lane to the house. There to meet us was a shiny, blue Meade LX200, 10-inch that John had setup for us. We all sat in our lawn chairs waiting for twilight to disappear as shooting stars began to fly by. Once it was dark enough John coached us how to look through the eyepiece and not touch anything. This was my first WOW experience with the night sky, because there in all its glory was Saturn and its rings!

Ed Fortier

My new friend who beat me out of the signed and inscribed copies of Starlight Nights and Guideposts to the Stars. He was however kind enough to send photos of his trophies and assure me that they would be in safe hands for a very long time.



THANK YOU!

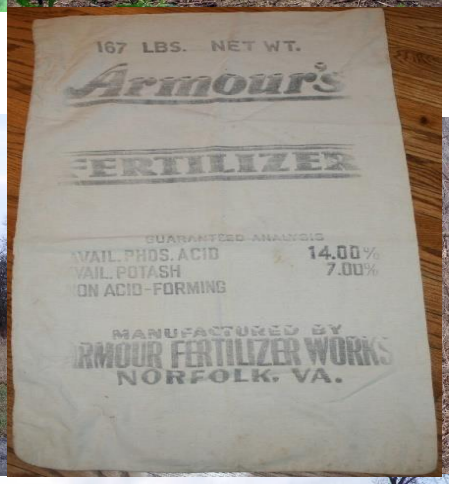



1990s This far-right wall of the house ^ is where Leslie stood outside as a boy to look northeast at Vega

Chuck G.

An avid long distance cyclist and photographer, Chuck has peddled around the Ohio countryside visiting towns, villages and cities. Sometime during the 1990s he went past Leslie's childhood home and took what is possibly the last photos of Leslie's farmhouse before it's teardown.

< These photos show the windows Leslie looked out of, the stairway that Stanley built and the view from the farm house looking towards where the Cow Pasture observatory use to be.



2015 Where Leslie's house use to be ^

2015 Where Grandpa's house use to be > also the road that Leslie walked to town ^


2015 The quarry across from Grandpa's ^ house where Leslie use to swim.

^2015 A view from the road of where the Cow Pasture observatory use to be

< 2015 A view showing where Grandpa's old walnut trees use to be. The old dead tree trunk in this photo may be one of those. Ω

AND SPECIAL RECOGNITION

for Don and Carolyn Hurless

Leslie, Don and Carolyn with Roger Kolman's reflector

When I started this project, there was very little of Leslie's history online. If not for Starlight Nights, a few photos scattered online and an AAVSO bio, I think his story would have soon disappeared from our culture.

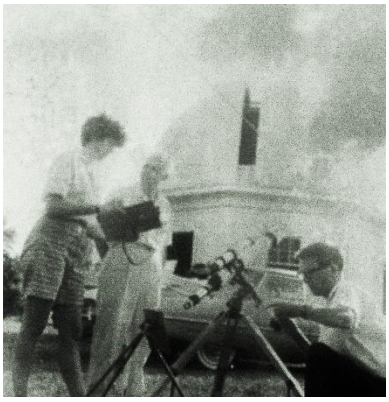
To be labeled "the world's most famous amateur astronomer" warranted a closer look see, not unlike a thorough Ken Burns documentary.

After two-years of research and study I can safely say that among "non-professional" astronomers who simply watch the night sky from their backyards with their small telescopes, I believe Leslie qualifies for the award.

Don and Carolyn Hurless dressed to match Leslie' new observatory

Hundreds of publications and news reports throughout his lifetime, both national and international, brought fame and notoriety during a time when people got most of their news from daily newspapers and magazines and when comets were watched and talked about.

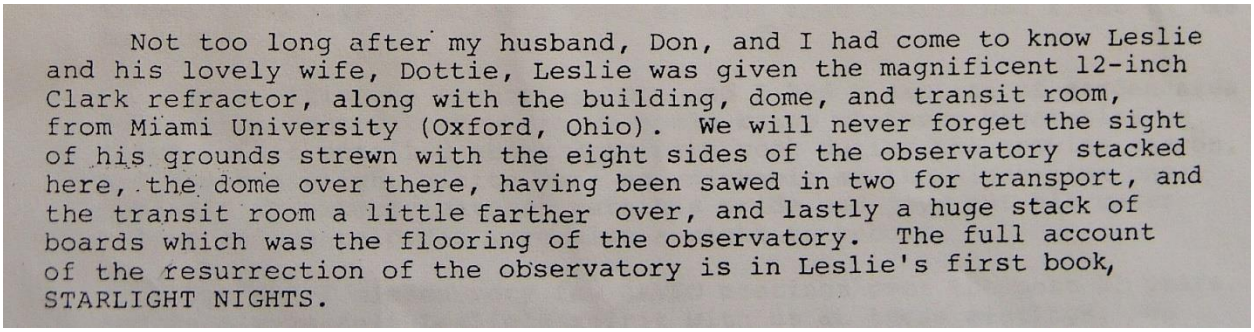
Being at the right place at the right time led me to Leslie Peltier memorabilia that existed outside the family and museums.



Don and Carolyn with Leslie during a solar eclipse using Don's refractor

Faithful custodians of this information for over 50 years were Don and Carolyn Hurless.

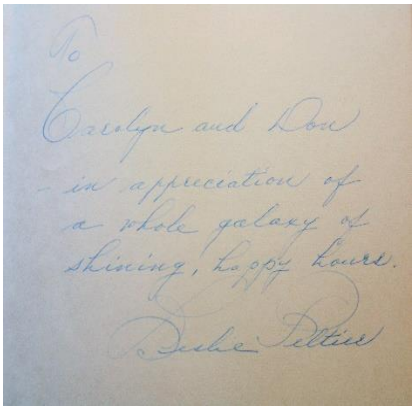
Don and Carolyn knew Leslie in the last 20 years of his life and lived in the next town only 12 miles away. Over that 20-year relationship, Leslie would entrust some his star charts and personal photographs with Don and Carolyn who shared with him in his "*Starlight Nights*." Ω



Not too long after my husband, Don, and I had come to know Leslie and his lovely wife, Dottie, Leslie was given the magnificent 12-inch Clark refractor, along with the building, dome, and transit room, from Miami University (Oxford, Ohio). We will never forget the sight of his grounds strewn with the eight sides of the observatory stacked here, the dome over there, having been sawed in two for transport, and the transit room a little farther over, and lastly a huge stack of boards which was the flooring of the observatory. The full account of the resurrection of the observatory is in Leslie's first book, STARLIGHT NIGHTS.

"The Auction"

Vinny Strosnider remembers…



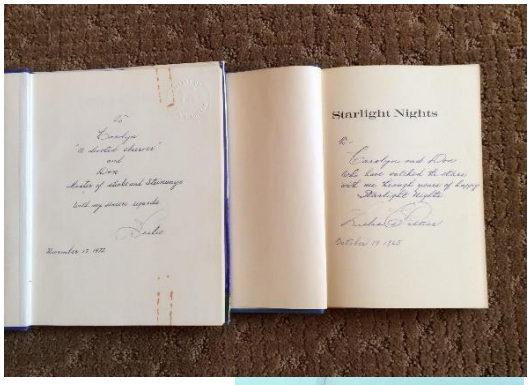
…it was early summer

and during my research on Leslie I came across a book for sale "*Sky Shooting, hunting the stars with your camera,*" by Newton and Margaret Mayall, 1949. Vague description, but with photos. I clicked on the photos of the book and there was an inscription…

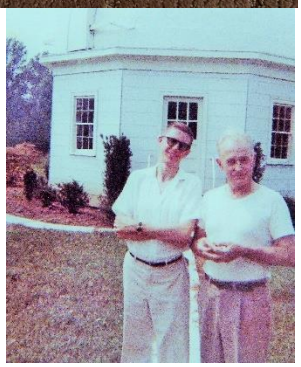
"*To Carolyn and Don, in appreciation of a whole galaxy of shining, happy hours. Leslie Peltier*"

High speed photography could not have recorded me pushing the BUY button.

Calling the seller, who I found out was a book store owner near Leslie's home town, I asked him where he got the book. Apparently, an attorney contacted him regarding an estate he was handling, asking if he would like to buy a few, signed Leslie Peltier books. The book store owner then went on to say that there would be an estate auction of the man's property and that there was a "file cabinet with astronomy stuff." I discovered I had just missed a first edition copy of "*Starlight Nights"* also inscribed by Leslie. The new owner of that book is now my new friend and I check on his wellbeing periodically.



I learned the estate auction was for Don Hurless, a man very well-known and respected in his hometown. A musician and composer. His wife also taught piano lessons to the people in that town along with piano tuning.



Don Hurless with Leslie

Living alone after his wife's passing for another 28 years and with no children, all he owned would be at the estate auction.

The auction house in charge posted photos of some of the things being sold. One photo caught my eye …**THE STARLIGHT OBSERVATORY.**

I had been wanting an 8x8 with easy open roof for my backyard observatory. Come to find out, this observatory had history. It was designed by Leslie Peltier and built in 1960.

Months later I found out the location of the auction. A very large, modern space at the public high school. "That's odd" I thought, "but never mind, I must have that observatory." Ω

1964 AAVSO Curt Anderson, Leslie Peltier, Carolyn Hurless, Dr. Tom Cragg, Clint Ford and Dr. Roger Kolman at the Starlight Observatory

Don Hurless 1927 - 2015

…auction day

With a U-Haul truck rented and waiting in the town of the auction, tools packed for the teardown and money in my pocket, three of us piled into my Ford Focus hatchback ready for adventure and a three-hour drive.

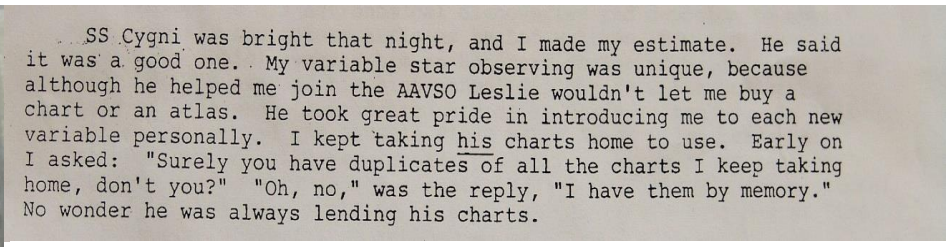
Once we arrived at the high school, I understood why the auction was being held there. Nothing was ever thrown away. Everything had value to this man. Even all the electric razors he had ever owned. Unknowingly at that moment, I did not understand this character trait would serve to preserve history. All I saw were piles and piles, boxes and boxes, of everything you could think of. Fifty years and more worth. I wasn't there for that because I was on a mission. Yet in amazement I would think to myself, "how did all this fit into his ranch house and basement?"

Six, grueling hours this auction lasted. Two auctioneers calling at the same time. One on each side of the room. One for each ear. I had looked through everything I was interested in. Waiting for the auction of the observatory. Five hours into the auction and ready to pass out, I needed a candy bar.

Sitting in one of the many folding chairs around. Many, many people milling about. Arranging items they wanted and waiting for the auctioneer. I had seen it all, mostly junk to me. I got up and walked over to a table full of stuff including 10 manila folders separated into two piles. Not interested before because of the countless folders of sheet music, however now bored, I opened the front cover of the folder on top. THEN IT HAPPENED! The **adrenalin rush**, the **eye bulge** and the **jaw dropping disbelief**.

It's like never having heard a rattlesnake before, but when you step on one you know what it is. Well, I had never seen what a 100-year-old star chart looks like, but I knew it when I saw it. And just as quick, a memory of something I had read the year before came to mind describing an event, of over 50 years ago, by the wife of the man who had owned all this stuff… Carolyn Hurless.

Delphos Canal Museum



SS Cygni was bright that night, and I made my estimate. He said it was a good one. My variable star observing was unique, because although he helped me join the AAVSO Leslie wouldn't let me buy a chart or an atlas. He took great pride in introducing me to each new variable personally. I kept taking his charts home to use. Early on I asked: "Surely you have duplicates of all the charts I keep taking home, don't you?" "Oh, no," was the reply, "I have them by memory." No wonder he was always lending his charts.

Above: Carolyn remembering her first variable star estimation of SS Cygni June 13th, 1959
Left: Leslie at the Comet Seeker inside the Cow Pasture observatory with his star charts

"**That's right**!" At my fingertips were some of Leslie Peltier's star charts. On the backside, handwritten dates and notes. A few dating back to 1918. The year of his introduction into the AAVSO and variable star astronomy. **If not for the candy bar, I surely would have passed out!** Ω

Carolyn Hurless and the file cabinet

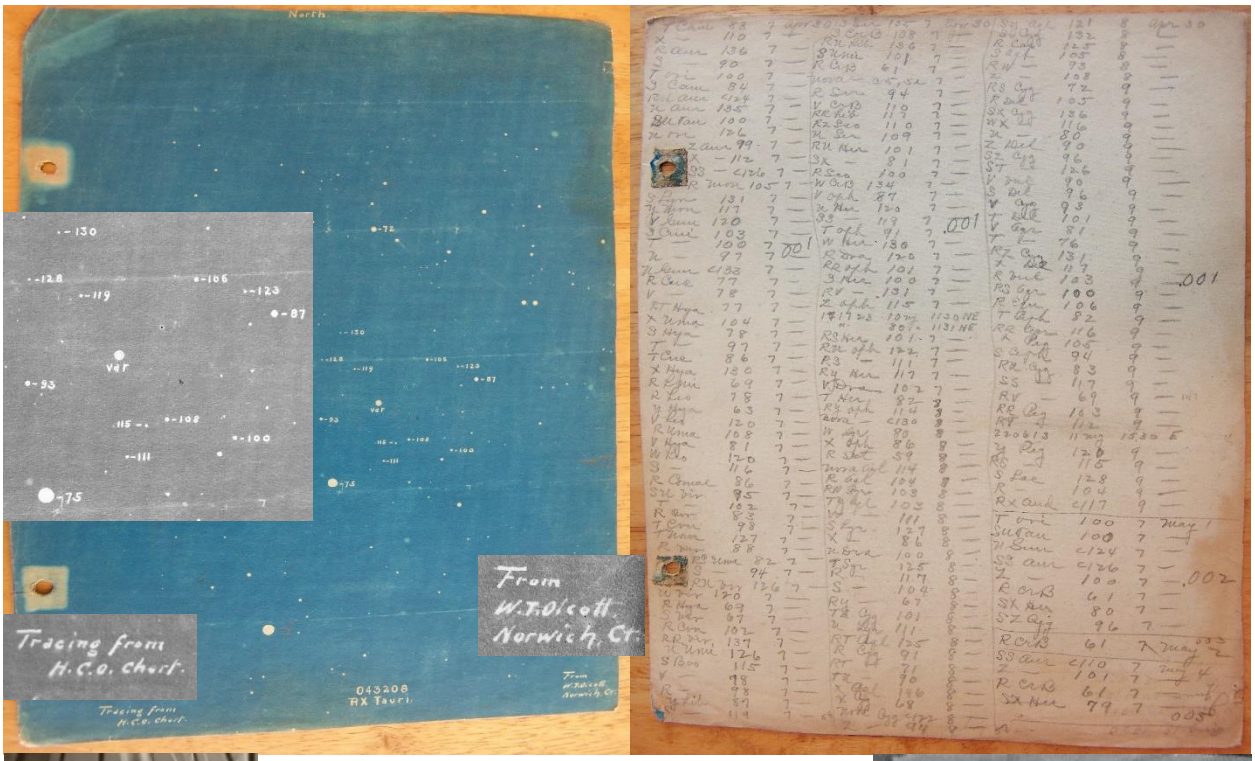
"…there's a file cabinet of astronomy stuff"

I knew there could be astronomy stuff but I never imagined that it would be Leslie's astronomy stuff. It seems that Carolyn kept the star charts at her basement office in her file cabinet for twenty years, and being the type of person Don was those charts stayed right in that same file cabinet for another thirty years. In total, Leslie's charts spent almost 100 years in someone's keeping

Well preserved by Leslie, then Carolyn, then Don and now have found new homes with museums and caring institutions.

In fact, Leslie would use the back of his original AAVSO blueprint star charts from the late teens and early twenties as scrap paper when he needed to keep observation logs inside the Merry-Go-Round observatory. There would be dates on the back of a chart from when he used the Strawberry Spyglass, then the open-air observatory with the 4-inch Mogey, then with the Comet Seeker inside the Cow Pasture observatory, then use it again inside the Merry-Go-Round twenty years later.

Pictured below is Leslie's AAVSO Blueprint Variable Star Chart RX Tauri front and back



This chart is an early 1911 or 1912 AAVSO blueprint star chart that was originally copied by William Tylor Olcott at his home and observatory in Norwich, Connecticut and used by Leslie first on August 18th, 1920, also 1921, 1922 and 1923. Later he would turn it upside down and use the backside of this chart as scrap paper inside the new Merry-Go-Round observing 158 variable stars in one single night on April 30th, year unknown but possibly 1938. Ω

Photos of the Moon and Saturn taken with the 12-inch

Leslie's 3-inch Gaertner transit scope inside the 12-inch observatory transit room and most likely where Leslie wrote his life story.

…as if that wasn't enough

back to the auction and not yet fully recovered, I seated myself some distance from the treasure as to not attract attention.

While waiting for the auctioneer to someday make it my way, I noticed people on the other side of the room going through old photo albums. Seeing that the auctioneer would be awhile, and my friends pursuing their own things to bid on, I walked over to the table and began looking through them.

The shock of discovering the charts was enough, but then came the knockout blow.

As I began going through the old photo albums I started seeing photos of Leslie and his observatories, of Brookhaven and the many visitors to it. Of newspaper clippings, fan letters and his telescopes.

As a fan of "*Starlight Nights"* and an amateur history detective I saw that here was a part of Leslie's life story in these photos.

History being more important to me maybe than most, I began to feel a responsibility to protect what's been discovered here.

Calculating my financial resources, I decided for the sake of preserving Leslie's lost history to abandon the observatory and focus my money on the star charts and photo albums.

An ebay dealer managed to get a couple items, but I was able to win the rest.

Once the all-day ordeal was over, my friends and I crammed ourselves and several boxes of Don and Carolyn's prized possessions into my Focus hatchback for the three-hour drive home.

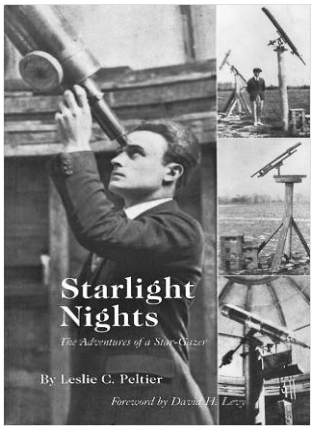
Memorial Sun Dial and Ohio Historical Marker at the Delphos Public Library
Watch this video on Leslie after the car commercial

Afterward, I monitored ebay and was able to purchase the items that had gone to the ebay dealer.

All in all, the experience of discovering "*Starlight Nights"* and Leslie Peltier has been a lot of fun for me. And I hope that you also have enjoyed your… Return to "*Starlight Nights*." Ω

"The Book"

Vinny Strosnider remembers…

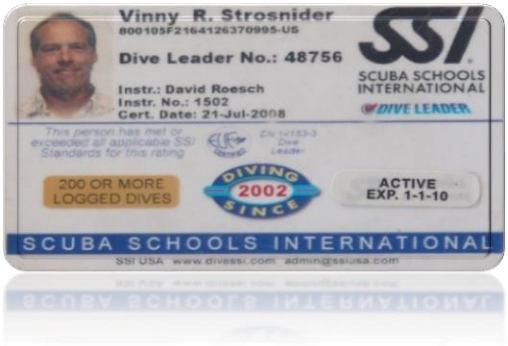


1999 Sky Publishing
History of Sky and Telescope

…time for a change

My experience with Leslie Peltier came during a time when I was reminiscing of my own boyhood. Then I met a farm boy, born January 2nd, 1900 in rural Ohio. Who at age 15, looking at the stars, asked himself "Why do I not know a single one of these stars?" 1916 began his adventure with the night sky. 2016 marks his …one hundred years with the stars.

For me it was at age 53, after becoming excited over the arrival of Comet Ison, that I asked a similar question.



…my background

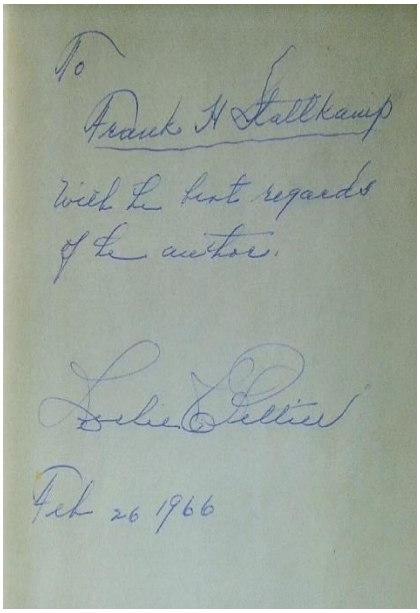
Years previous, beach laden, tropical isles were my destinations. Boyhood imaginations, sparked by Jacques Cousteau and Flipper, led me to undersea adventures and coral reefs. Those adventures then led me to a time, later in life, wanting to stay closer to home and saving all that money for travel. But *now* what do I do?

"Then Comet Ison, I heard about it on the news. It was my first comet. Watching it on Space.com. Around the sun, it goes, when it returns, nobody knows. Wait for it, waiting for it. Wait a minute, is that all there is? Well, you know the rest …mmmm."

Well, still excited I began to wonder about telescopes. Looking at all the magazine ads, drooling. "So much for saving all that money" I would think. Those magazine ads did not tell me about the dreaded disease that is spreading from stargazer to astronomer, ravaging bank accounts and threatening homelessness, …Aperture Fever!

Well, then I thought at least I would save money by not traveling. No one told me about all those dark-sky-star-parties "in the far-off boonies" and all that camping equipment needed! OH-YEAH, don't forget all those eyepieces. Well, I thought at least sitting in a pitch-dark field, with noises of possible Bigfoot, and me dropping pieces and parts into the bottomless grass would be easier on my ageing body. But, no one told me about this cold wet stuff that appears out of nowhere and envelopes you until your toes hurt and your nose runs. Or the humid nights that me and my scope would both sweat our hinies off. All the telescope ad told me was that "*I would have the best time of my life*" ...mmmm!

I would look up at the light polluted night sky over my house and see at least three or four big dippers. The full moon was always fun in the telescope until the ice cream headach set in from too much too fast. I didn't know it at the time but I needed an intervention or to take up yoga. Ω



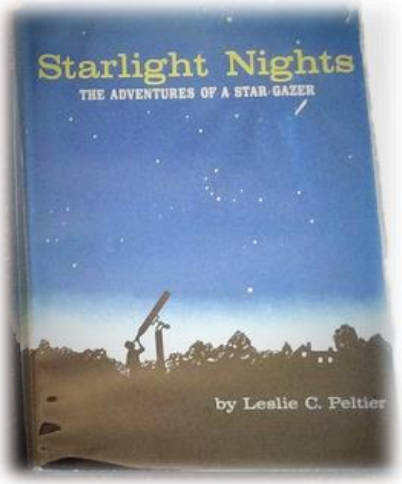
To Frank H Stallkamp

…a curious boy

Then my buddy told me of a childhood memory of he and his grandpa stopping in the small town where his grandpa lived to visit a man who had an observatory. Knocking on the door, a friendly, white haired man opened the door and invited them in. Sitting around the kitchen table, as people did in those days, grandpa and the white-haired man, around the same age, talked of small town things as only small town people can do.

He then told me of a time, a year or two before that kitchen visit, he had a visit with his uncle. His uncle, it seems, had a library of books. Curious as most young boys are, my buddy started looking over the collection. Something caught his eye. A blue book jacket cover with a drawing of someone looking through a telescope. Fascinated, he opened the front cover and saw an inscription to his uncle "with the best regards of the author -Leslie C Peltier February 26, 1966."

Turning the page, he then read… "There is a chill in the Autumn air as I walk down the path that leads along the brow of the hill, past the garden and the big lilac, to the clearing just beyond. Already in the gathering dusk, a few of the stars are turning on their lights." A quote that my buddy still recites over 40 years later. And now, a short time after reading the book, he finds himself in the author's kitchen. The curious boy, his grandpa and Leslie Peltier.



As time waxes, memory wanes. After 40 years that boyhood memory now has some parts missing. Yet, two things remain. The stark difference between the boy's imagined young author and the old, white haired man he met at the door. Also, a plastic shower cap covering the far end of a really-big telescope.

My buddy now has his uncle's inscribed copy. The name of the book? "*Starlight Nights the Adventures of a Star Gazer.*"

A week after my buddy's story I found myself yelling at those stupid clouds again for hiding, yet another, history making, astronomical event. "Stupid clouds!" Why buy a telescope if all it does is make clouds?"

John Stallkamp the "Curious Boy" visited Leslie Peltier in Delphos, Ohio with his grandpa after reading "Starlight Nights." Ω

Mr. Peltier's Book

Leslie Peltier has once again brought fame and honor to his hometown of Delphos.

Mr. Peltier's book, "Starlight Nights" will further spread the good name of Delphos to thousands upon thousands of people who might not have been acquainted with our city.

In many respects, Mr. Peltier makes the lives of all of us a little better for the privilege of having him amongst us, for the privilege of being able to have his good works accomplished in the midst of us.

To have a scholar living in a city always has been a great honor for that city. Sometimes, long after the generals and the politicians are gone and their names erased in the sands of time, the city is remembered only for being the place where a great composer or a great architecht, or a great author accomplished their work. Many of the ancient cities of the world today are known chiefly as being the place where a philosopher wrote or spoke his words of wisdom.

The feeling for this is still very much alive. Colleges and nations vie to attract great scholars.

With Mr. Peltier, we have been fortunate to have him grow up amongst us, to attend school here, to find his lifetime work and to study the stars from his observatory in Delphos.

Many a man during his lifetime finds himself honored throughout the world, but not by his own neighbors. In Mr. Peltier's case, the honor also comes from his neighbors. His need for privacy to continue his studies is respected by the community, but this does not diminish by one ounce the respect that young and old in Delphos have for him during his lifetime.

The neighbors of Mr. Peltier in Delphos join his neighbors in the world of science in wishing him great success in the forthcoming publication of his book. We hope it is the first of a number of books from his pen, just as the discovery of his first comet back in 1925 was the first of a series of discoveries that were to classify him as the world's greatest nonprofessional astronomer.

Milton Cohen

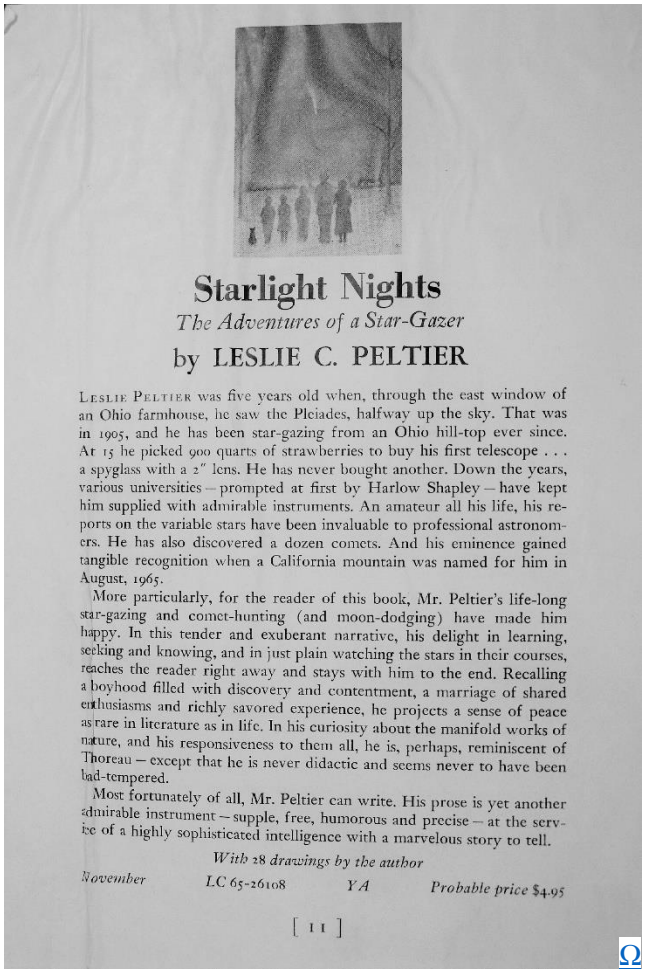
After reading the book I now know what astronomy is… "***A wonder to my soul.***"

…starlight fame

"OK," I thought, "I'll read this book at bed time to help me fall asleep." What a rude awakening, literally. I did not want to stop reading this book! It's right up my alley. Maybe yours too.

Imagine life before the Aero-plane, Model-T and even Alec-tricity. Certainly, it is full of boyhood fantasy, but also of well-educated and well-read history. No tall tales here. There's the moon, planets and stars, but also detailed sketches of historic events and adventure stories.

This book is for those who need a vacation. Wanting to visit places and times through storytelling. Memories from Leslie's life. Him retelling of simple things from yesteryear. Leslie was not just an astronomer that wrote a book. He was also a writer who wrote of his experience with life, nature and his surroundings.



Starlight Nights

The Adventures of a Star-Gazer

by LESLIE C. PELTIER

LESLIE PELTIER was five years old when, through the east window of an Ohio farmhouse, he saw the Pleiades, halfway up the sky. That was in 1905, and he has been star-gazing from an Ohio hill-top ever since. At 15 he picked 900 quarts of strawberries to buy his first telescope . . . a spyglass with a 2" lens. He has never bought another. Down the years, various universities – prompted at first by Harlow Shapley – have kept him supplied with admirable instruments. An amateur all his life, his reports on the variable stars have been invaluable to professional astronomers. He has also discovered a dozen comets. And his eminence gained tangible recognition when a California mountain was named for him in August, 1965.

More particularly, for the reader of this book, Mr. Peltier's life-long star-gazing and comet-hunting (and moon-dodging) have made him happy. In this tender and exuberant narrative, his delight in learning, seeking and knowing, and in just plain watching the stars in their courses, reaches the reader right away and stays with him to the end. Recalling a boyhood filled with discovery and contentment, a marriage of shared enthusiasms and richly savored experience, he projects a sense of peace as rare in literature as in life. In his curiosity about the manifold works of nature, and his responsiveness to them all, he is, perhaps, reminiscent of Thoreau – except that he is never didactic and seems never to have been bad-tempered.

Most fortunately of all, Mr. Peltier can write. His prose is yet another admirable instrument – supple, free, humorous and precise – at the service of a highly sophisticated intelligence with a marvelous story to tell.

With 28 drawings by the author

November *LC 65-26108* *YA* *Probable price $4.95*

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Ω

18 17 Harper & Row, Publishers 49 East 33rd Street, New York 16, New York
INCORPORATED

September 22, 1965

Mrs. Lucille Schell
Schell's Bookstore
119 North Elizabeth Street
Lima, Ohio

Dear Mrs. Schell:

Our salesman Bob Sachs, has written to ask that we send you galley proofs on STAR-LIGHT NIGHTS by Leslie C. Peltier, which we will publish November 17. They are enclosed, along with catalog copy and other material which may come in handy in your plans for promoting the book.

We're extremely proud of having STARLIGHT NIGHTS on our list, and we expect it to sell well through the years. Mr. Peltier writes extremely well and you like him as a person very much as you read his work. He did small drawings for chapter headings in the book (one is on the catalog page) and also the jacket design is his idea also.

Of course we are pleased that you want to do something special on the book, and if there is anything else we can do to help, will you please let us know?

Sincerely yours,

Harold E. Grove
Staple Trade Department

HEG:emo
Encl.
CC: Robert Sachs

Ω

Leslie Peltier

Nine hundred quarts of strawberries started a starry-eyed Delphos boy on a hobby that led to having a comet and a mountain peak named for him.

Leslie Peltier's family raised strawberries, among other things, on the farm at Delphos. Pickers got two cents a quart and Leslie's fingers flew in order to earn the $18 he needed for the two-inch telescope he wanted to buy.

Out in the cow pasture, he mounted the telescope on a fencepost topped with an old grindstone. Surrounded by interested cows, he studied the stars and sent reports to the American Association of Variable Star Observers. Impressed with his observations, the society offered him the use of a four-inch glass which was later replaced with a six-inch telescope loaned by Princeton University. Years later when Miami University at Oxford, Ohio, dismantled its observatory, he came into possession of their big 12-inch objective lens.

During his cold winter watch, young Peltier often had to bring his telescope indoors to defrost the lens. His father suggested they build an observatory to shield him from the elements. This building caused no end of inquiries from passers-by who wanted to know what that domed structure out in the middle of the cow pasture was. The most common guess was that it was a new fangled chicken coop.

Leslie Peltier was born Jan. 2, 1900. Today he is known as the world's greatest non-professional astronomer and has the only private observatory in the world. In his years of sky watching, Mr. Peltier has discovered three stars and 12 comets. The brightest of the comets which he has discovered is the one which he sighted in 1936 and which is named for him.

None of us will ever see that comet since it will not be visible for another 450 years.

In 1965 when the Ford Observatory was dedicated in California, the mountain peak on which it is located was named Mount Peltier in recognition of the Ohio astronomer's contributions to the field.

Astronomy is really a sidelight with Mr. Peltier. By profession he is a designer for the Delphos Bending Company which manufactures children's toys and furniture. Mr. Peltier, a quiet reserved man, has other interests beside his job and astronomy. He enjoys minerology, photography and gardening.

Mr. Peltier is married to Dorothy Nihiser and has two sons, Stanley and Gordon.

And what do astronomers do on cloudy nights when there are no stars to watch? They write books. At least that is what Mr. Peltier has done. He not only wrote, but also illustrated his autobiography entitled "Starlight Nights", which was published in 1965.

"Writing 'Starlight Nights'," says the author, "occupied the cloudy nights of two whole years. As it is mostly autobiographical, very little research was necessary. The idea of writing the book came from a friend, Edwin Way Teale, who suggested I write down some of my impressions and experiences during my many years of star-gazing."

Not only is the book interesting for the information it gives on stars, comets, etc., but it is an entertaining account of life in the early 1900's when a boy attended a one-room school, did his homework at the dining room table which was centered with an oil lamp and a bowl of popcorn, and while he herded cows along the lazy Auglaize River, dreamed of the Indians and the canal boats that had once passed his back door.

"There is a chill in the autumn air as I walk down the path that leads along the brow of the hill, past a garden and big lilac, to the clearing just beyond. Already in the gathering dusk, a few of the stars are turning on their lights." So begins this book of reminisecences by a man who since this century has held communion with the world of nature, and has brought fame to Delphos.

Ω

Delphos astronomer internationally famous

LESLIE PELTIER, Delphos' astronomer, is internationally known for his discovery of 12 comets and two stars, one of which bears his name.

Delphos astronomer Leslie Peltier contributed much to the pioneering spirit with his discovery of 12 comets and two stars, one of which bears his name.

A desire to scan the heavens as a young lad on his parents' farm spurred him to strawberry picking plus other farm chores to raise the $18 for a two-inch telescope.

Out in the cow pasture, he mounted the telescope on a fence post topped with an old grindstone. Surrounded by interested cows, he studied the stars and sent reports to the American Association of Variable Star Observers. Impressed with his observations, the society offered him use of a four-inch glass which was later replaced with a six-inch telescope loaned by Princeton University. Years later when Miami University at Oxford, Ohio, dismantled its observatory, he came into possession of their big 12-inch objective lens.

During his cold winter watch, young Peltier often had to bring his telescope indoors to defrost the lens. His father suggested they build an observatory to shield him from the elements. Inquiries and speculations from passers-by thought it a new type of chicken coop. He continued to pioneer to the point of having the only private observatory in the world.

IN 1965 the Ford Observatory located on a mountain peak in California recognized the wealth of knowledge Mr Peltier shared with Americans and chose to honor his work by naming the peak, Mount Peltier.

He authored two books: "Starlight Nights," a 1966 Ohioana Book award winner; and "Guideposts to the Stars," an introduction to the night skies.

"Starlight Nights" gives data on stars, comets as well as an entertaining account of life in the early 1900s when a boy attended a one-room school, studied his homework at a dining room table centered with an oil lamp and a bowl of popcorn. He told of herding cows along the Auglaize River, dreamed of Indians and canal boats that had once passed his back door.

By profession he is a designer for the Delphos Bending Company. He enjoys astronomy as a sidelight in addition to mineralogy, photography and gardening.

He is married to Dorothy Nihiser and has two sons, Stanley and Gordon.

PELTIER knows the thrills and communion with nature, and has brought fame to the Delphos area.

In mid-January 1974, he eagerly awaited the sighting of Comet Kohoutek but found it to be faintly visible.

"When the comet passed near the sun, the sun did not activate the gases, and illuminate it as predicted."

The Comet West drew his attention this past March and April. This comet was only visible beyond the naked eye.

Each evening must hold new surprises as he gazes into the wonderment of the heavens.

Ω

40403 Road 56, Dinuba, California 93618
October 25, 1971

Dear Leslie Peltier

You said you would like to have thanked Earnest Thompson Seton for having written TWO LITTLE SAVAGES, and ROLF IN THE WOODS. I acknowledge my debt to Seton, too, and especially to the author of SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON. But very recently, within the last three months, I have found another book to cherish, and I am anxious to express my gratitude to its author.

STARLIGHT NIGHTS gives me a sense of continuity with my earliest, good reading. And the book exerts as wholesome an influence over my 'philosophic years' as did those companions of my boyhood in northern Wisconsin. That is to say, when I look at the constellations, or when I get out my 3-inch telescope, I feel an awareness of the boy (and man) who watched them through summers and winters in Ohio. I can follow the trails he blazed, note the markers he placed, wonder at his skill and persistence when he scouts among the stars. It is the kind of companionship that a lone observer like myself welcomes - a kind of sharing of experience that is good, and gracious, and a comfort to my declining years.

You make it clear that star-gazing is only one of your many pursuits, and from time to time you digress in an amiable and entertaining fashion. But there is a remarkable unity to STARLIGHT NIGHTS quite apart from its subject matter. I suppose this unity could be described as: a calm, unhurried purposefulness (faithfulness) through the years; a stability based on values that many of us learned to trust in childhood; a sense of proportion in harmony with Nature's best. An overall summary, not too far-fetched, I think, is found in Thomas Gray's Elegy:

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
'His' sober wishes never learn'd to stray;
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
'He' kept the noiseless tenor of 'his' way.

Yours sincerely,

Howard H Wang

P.S.

An astronomer from the Griffith Observatory recommended STARLIGHT NIGHTS to me. I was dismayed to find that it is not listed in current catalogues; had to have recourse to the library.

H. W.

The following was suggested to run in VV's by Leslie Peltier, as he (and others) thought it was quite humorous, tho non-astronomical!!

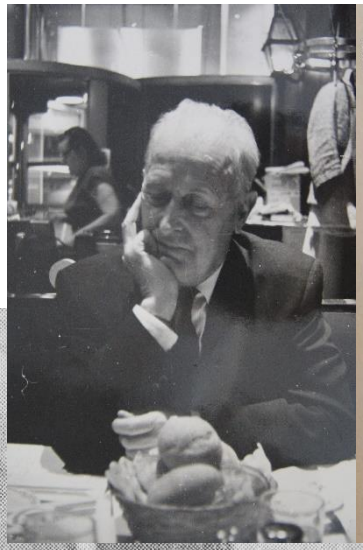
The teacher gave her pupils a test on the human body . All the youngsters passed except one, who wrote:

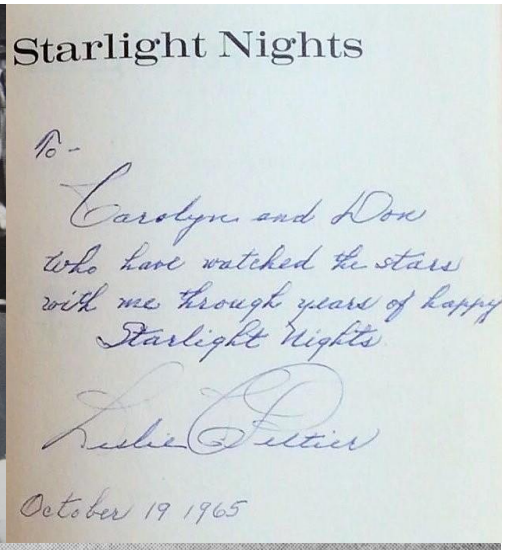
" The human body is composed of three parts--- the Brainium, the Borax and the Abominable Cavity. The Brainium contains the brain. The Borax contains the lungs, the liver and the living things. The Abominable Cavity contains the bowels, of which there are five: a, e, i, o and u.

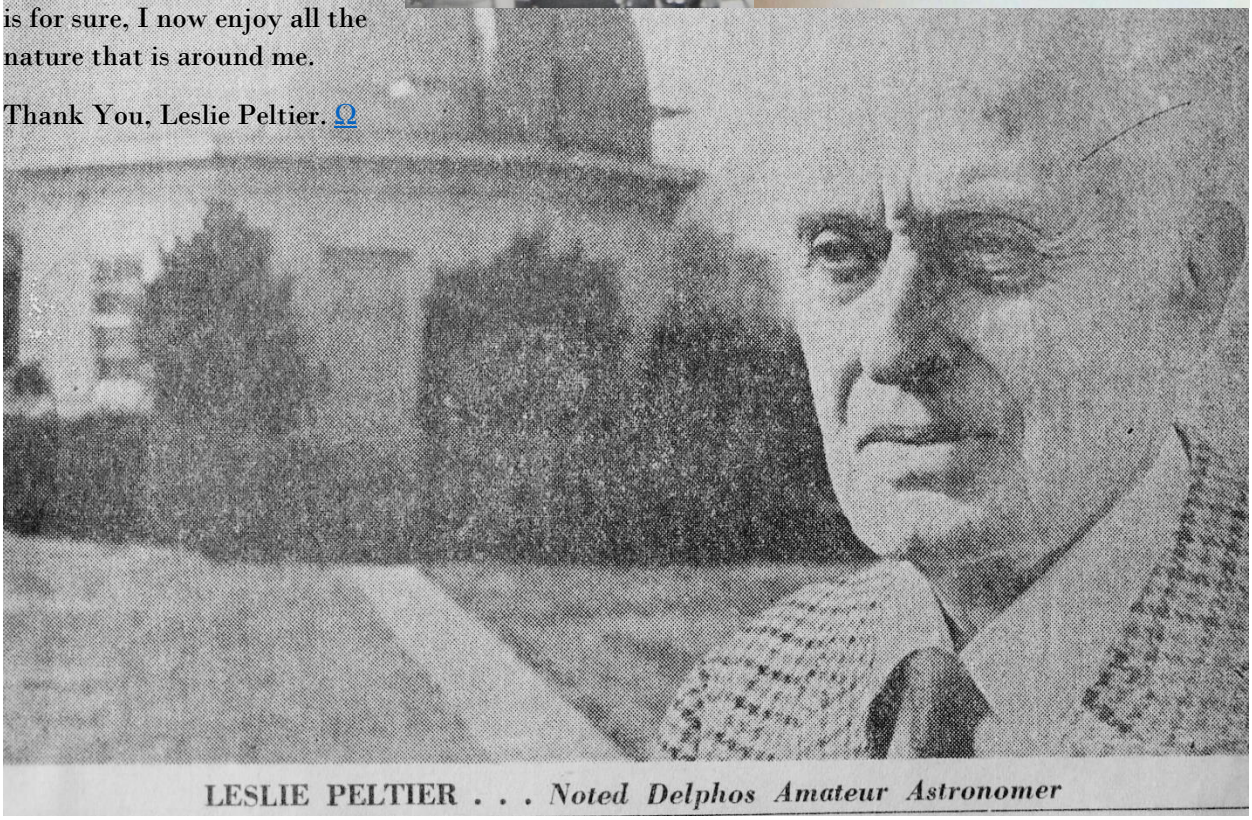
There's also some other good news about Leslie, we might add. His book, the first of three he has written, STARLIGHT NIGHTS is going to be printed again. We can't tell who or when, but it's in the works right now...you'll see the ad when it does appear...we say: "It's about time". Just to remind you, his 3rd book is still available.

So now after reading Leslie's story, if my double stars don't quite split or my polar alignment just "ain't what it's 'posed to be," that's ok. I just sit back and listen to the crickets and tree frogs, checking that my Bigfoot mace is handy. I may glance over to Pleiades or Orion, or I may gaze in awe of how three hundred "**million**" of our Sun can fit into that one little red star named Antares. One thing is for sure, I now enjoy all the nature that is around me.

Thank You, Leslie Peltier. Ω





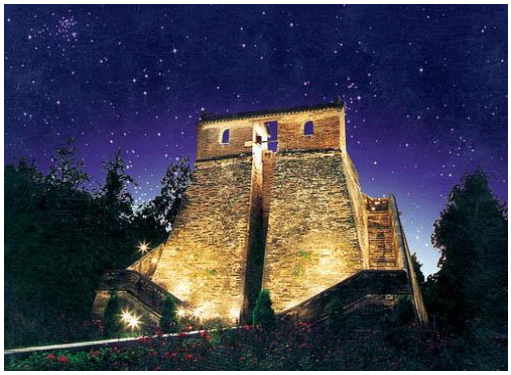


LESLIE PELTIER . . . *Noted Delphos Amateur Astronomer*

TIME CAPSULES *with Leslie C. Peltier*

"The Backyard Astronomer and their Telescopes" by Vinny Strosnider

"Cheomseongdae" 7th century star-gazing platform South Korea



"Gaocheng Town" 13th century observatory China

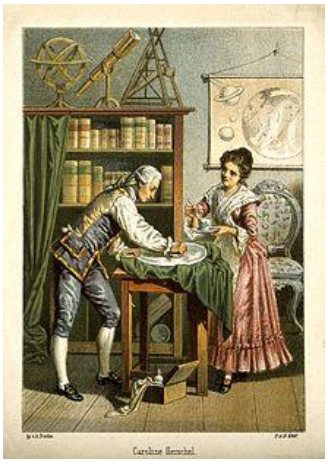
...the roots of astronomy

Watching the night Sky in its purest form has been around since mankind first worshiped the divine and ancient civilizations used the Sun and Moon to calculate planting and harvest seasons.

The naked eye was the first instrument to observe the planets during a time when it was thought that those lights in the sky revolved around the earth. Monuments built by ancient civilizations around the world marked the annual procession of these celestial markers.

Galileo Scope

It was Europe, however, that began the advent of watching the night sky with the telescope. In the early 1600s, Hans Lipperhey, a German spectacle (eye glass) maker from the Netherlands, discovered how to put glass lenses together to magnify a distant object. Galileo of Pisa, Italy, then improved on the invention. Galileo discovered with his crude, homemade telescope that moons revolved around Jupiter and the rings around Saturn first resembled a planet with ears.



The Herschels polishing a mirror

In the 1700s, William Herschel, A German youth that immigrated to England at the age of nineteen, designed and built much larger telescopes, over 400 total in his lifetime. Once it was discovered that mirrors could be used to capture the image, Hershel made his own mirrors with the help of his sister Caroline by pouring a mixture of hot copper and tin into a mold. Metal blanks, known as speculum metal, cooled and were then polished to a reflective, mirror like finish.

As the invention of the telescope progressed and its design improved, it was recognized by institutions of higher education among the European aristocrats and the wealthy. The title of "Professional Astronomer" was adopted, their science and duties organized and their observatories built all over Europe. Europeans became the preeminent telescope makers of refractor and reflector telescopes in the old world.

As old England began to establish and settle new England, now the United States, the wealthy aristocrats began building new institutions of higher learning. Astronomy was a part of that new plan. Refractor telescopes, using glass lenses only, became the preferred design. Ω

…astronomy comes to the new world

The new England colonists however separated from old England in the latter 1700s. Opposed to the King of England's "taxation without representation" policy, the colonists, by way of revolt, established a new form of government and a new world.

As a nation is formed, American astronomy is yet to awaken. With conflicts to work out and more wars to be fought, the new nation's future was being hammered out.

Later in the 1800s, wars with old England were ending in the northeastern United States. The wealthy saw the need to once again build institutions of higher learning as their legacy. Slowly and in-between wars, astronomy begins to establish itself in the new world as observatories were being built and astronomers from the old world, now living in the new republic, were traveling back to Europe to purchase the latest design in telescopes.

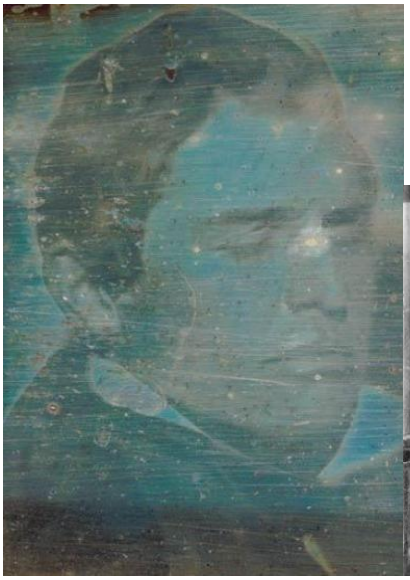
Hopkins Observatory, one of the oldest in the U.S. still standing. Williamstown, Massachusetts: Williams College, built from 1836 to 1838. The first telescope used was from England, the second telescope used was from Alvin Clark and Sons of Cambridgeport, Massachusetts. A 7-inch refractor built in 1852. Alvin Clark's first telescope sold.

Now, the original thirteen, old English colonies had become large cities within the new republic. Growth expansion continued due to trade among the major waterways.

The New York colony, a name that was carried over from York, England, increased in knowledge from the old country and adopted her old ways into the new.

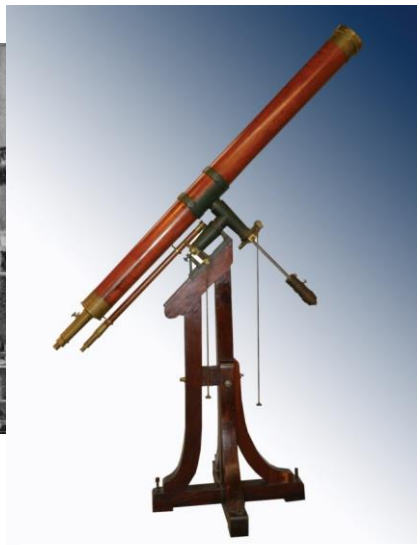
In the mid-1800s, a man named Henry Fitz, an amateur astronomer from his youth, became the first commercial telescope maker in the United States. Living in New York, Fitz had a great mind for invention and mechanical ability.

Fitz built wooden, foot peddle style, glass grinding equipment to make his lenses for his wood tube refractors, such as Leslie Peltier's Fitz Comet Seeker.



A self-portrait "daguerreotype" of Henry Fitz 1839 National Museum of American History

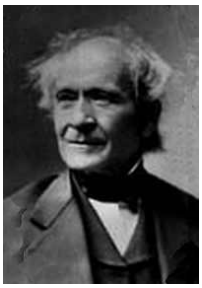
This is the actual work shop of Henry Fitz relocated from New York to the Smithsonian Museum in Washington D.C. during the 1950s



Another example of a Fitz design Ω

...then came Alvin Clark, the professional's telescope maker

Alvin Clark and Sons



Alvin Clark

It's now the late 1800s and telescope making has become a part of the free world. Europe had been in the business for a century. The New World for only decades. Telescope manufactures began to spring up. The most notable of them was Alvin Clark. A portrait painter by trade. With the help of his sons and seasoned craftsmen, Clark and Sons of Bridgeport, Massachusetts went on to become the premier American telescope makers of their day, manufacturing the largest refractor instruments used by universities and professional observatories on into the 1900s.

1893 40-inch Clark Refractor Chicago's World Fair

Still isolated from the general population, universities primarily used their observatories and telescopes for scientific work and documentation. Observatory directors would communicate their findings with other observatories. These reports would be published within scientific periodicals.

Reading these science magazines is what began the interest in the U.S. among the science minded that were not privy to the use of the professional astronomer's telescope.

Scientific American Magazine

Some of the smaller refractors manufactured found their way to the private homes of those who had the financial resources to afford them. From time to time, a serious hobbyist could get their hands on one of these instruments. But, because of the cost, owning a manufactured telescope was a difficult and needless expense in the life of a layman.

The 19th century science magazines and their reports from the professional observatories are what helped to feed and satisfy the layman's appetite for exploring the night sky. Ω

…then came Russell Porter, the Amateur's telescope maker

One of the most accomplished men of the early 20th century among American achievers. Artist, engineer, surveyor, artic explorer, amateur astronomer and one of the founders of American amateur telescope making. Porter taught on the science of the reflector telescope and of making a mirror.

Russell Porter demonstrating one of his designs

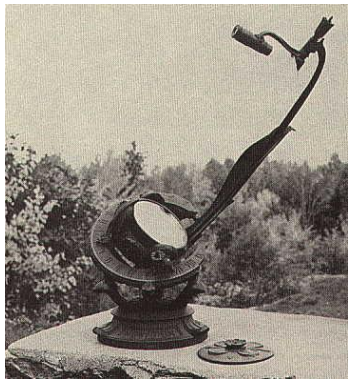
Some of the men that attended the classes worked at a local machine shop. They helped Porter in creating some of his more elaborate designs.

The most famous design being the "*The Garden Telescope.*

By 1920. Porter had learned telescope making from a friend and began to share that information with others. Porter taught his first class of men and one women with welcomed success. From there he decided to use a 30-acre property that he owned called Breezy Hill, just outside of Springfield, Vermont, for an astronomy club geared to amateur telescope makers. A building was built and Porter named it "Stellafane." Latin for …*Shrine to the Stars*.

Porter with his Garden Telescope

Stellafane astronomy and telescope club



An original Russell Porter Garden Telescope is on display in the museum of the Cincinnati Observatory Cincinnati, Ohio

The Back-Yard Astronomer series popularized astronomy for the non-professional

After years of teaching classes with increased popularity, Porter was asked to write a couple of articles for *Scientific American* magazine on telescope making.

Once these articles were published, an enormous response from the readership led to a book being written and more classes being taught. Ω

The Sidewalk Astronomer

…come see the moon, come see the moon

It's now the end of the 20th century and almost the beginning of the new millennium. A lone voice can be heard on a busy, San Francisco sidewalk. A slender man with grey hair and a ponytail calls out to those passing by. This is the next highlight in history for the backyard astronomer, with limited funds, but wanting a bigger telescope.

Using an old ship's port-window fashioned into a mirror, a cardboard tube and used eyepieces from an old pair of broken binoculars, this former monk shared astronomy with literally thousands of men, women and children walking past and encouraging them to build their own telescope.

Dobson explaining his Sun Telescope

Known as the Sidewalk Astronomer, John Dobson shared the wonders of the Universe and how to view it on a shoestring budget.

Dobson's contribution to amateur astronomy allowed people to build large size telescope tubes and view their desired celestial object with ease.

Much like a mount for an old cannon used by pirates, the "Dobsonian Mount" allows the astronomer to move their large aperture tubes up and down, right to left, with very little effort.

Instead of the observer looking through the eyepiece at the back end like a refractor, the eyepiece on a simple reflector design is located on the front end. For the small scopes, the observer can stand on the ground and look through the eyepiece.

For larger apertures requiring longer tubes to achieve proper focus, the observer must stand on a ladder or platform to look through the eyepiece.

A reflector telescope used on a mount that was originally designed by John Dobson soon became known as a "Dobsonian Telescope."

…WOW, look at that

These four words have been spontaneously uttered by more people looking through telescopes than any other. First for the moon, then for Jupiter and it's four moons and then for the amazing Saturn and its rings. Most people remember their first good view of Saturn. Though now in our day, telescopes have advanced to offer us a better view of Saturn with its rings than the view Galileo had of a planet with ears.

However, as important as these people and their creative inventions have been in telescope making, the men and women, boys and girls that carry their bought and built telescopes or handy binoculars out to their backyards or balconies, are the backbone of amateur astronomy. Ω

…a portrait of the backyard astronomer

Ω

...how to catch a supernova

Hobbyist Discovers A Supernova

Star watching, a district man's "adventure of the mind" for the past 27 years, has enabled him to become only the third man in history to visually discover a supernova in the heavens.

Gustave "Gus" Johnson, 40, a Mt. Lebanon High School graduate who moved to western Maryland in 1961 to better his study of the constellations, made his discovery there last Wednesday evening.

What he saw through his 8-inch reflector telescope was 40 million light years away in the galaxy known as Messier 100.

Recalling yesterday how he noticed the bright little star, Johnson said, "It looked a little odd, tucked in a corner of M-100."

With his pastor, the Rev. David Long, Johnson returned to his residence to check a star chart, which did not list his find. They hurried back for another look, but "the constellation had drifted behind the trees."

After he sent notice of the discovery to the American Association of Variable Star Observers, which in turn alerted observatories, Johnson saw his supernova again the next night. So did the Kitt Peak Observatory near Tucson, Ariz., and an Italian observatory.

A supernova has been described as the bright flaring of a star before it burns out. Its brightness up to 24 times greater than that of the sun, a supernova diminishes in intensity over months or years until it becomes identifiable only as a pulse on today's modern astronomical equipment.

Last night, Johnson's supernova was still burning brightly — in fact, it had increased several magnitudes in intensity, indicating it has not yet peaked.

The last time someone searching with a simple telescope spotted a new supernova was in the mid-1920s. The first such discovery was in the 1880s in the Andromeda galaxy, only two million light years away.

"This shows that 19th century astronomy isn't dead," remarked Johnson. He counted his discovery as a victory for the

(Continued on Page A-4, Column 4)

(Continued from Page A-1)

"visual observer" who, without the elaborate technology of the 20th century, still watches the sky and finds it "amazing to contemplate the extent of the universe."

A part-time high school teacher, Johnson began star watching in the seventh grade in Vandergrift, where he was born.

His high school years were "pre-Sputnik," so Johnson is largely self-taught in astronomy, although he has attended three colleges en route to his teaching degree.

He is still active in the Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh, the country's second largest and oldest group devoted to star gazing.

"It's a wonderful birthday present for our association," said Tom Reiland, president-elect of the local astronomers, who will be celebrating their 50th anniversary in June.

Johnson indicated he may make the trip for the local group's week-long celebration.

But in the meantime, he estimated he has at least an additional two or three weeks of gazing through his telescope at the supernova he was the first in the world to see.

DISCOVERING A SUPERNOVA

Gus E. Johnson
R. D. 2 Box 67
Swanton, Maryland 21561

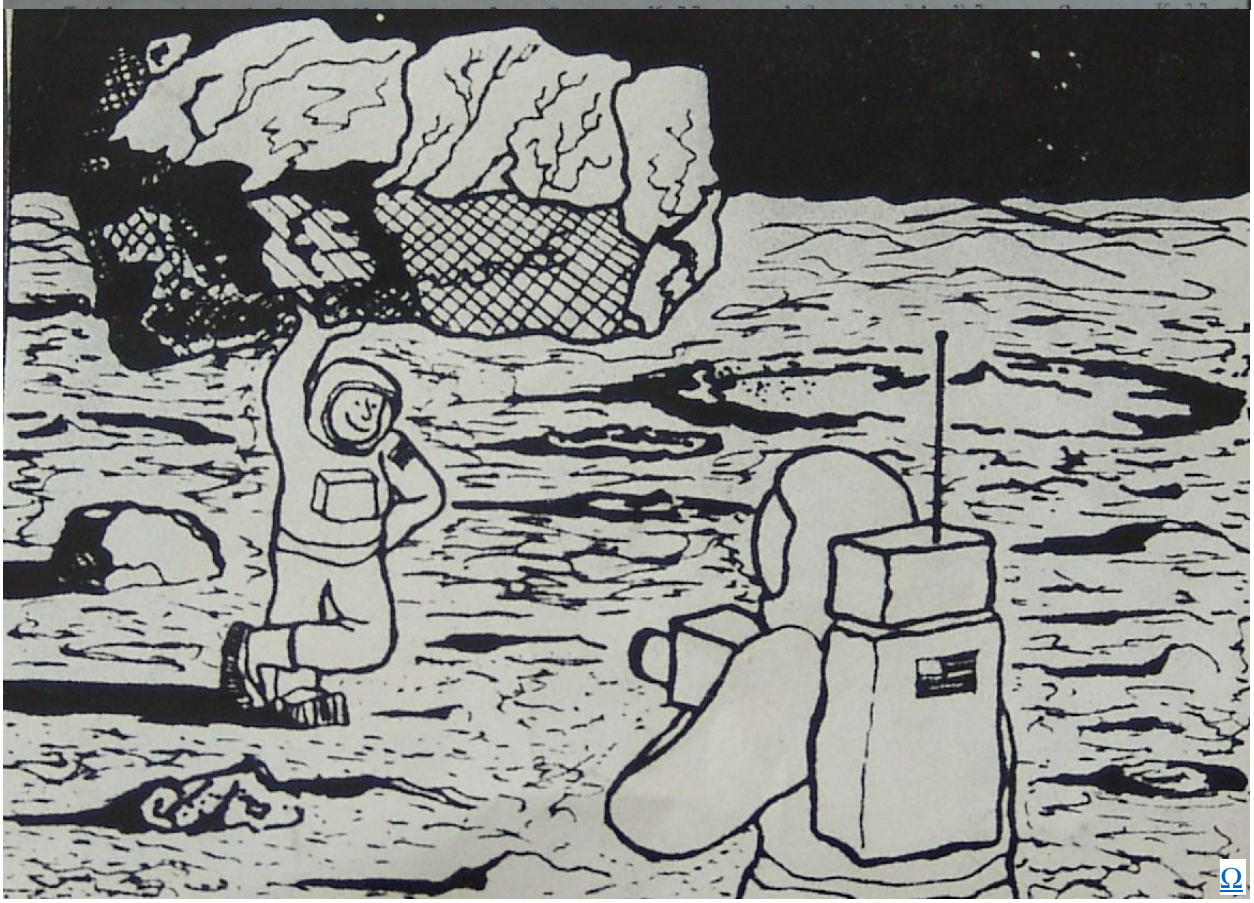
★★★★★

Your editor requested that I write up just how it was that I discovered a supernova. Galaxies have long been a favorite class of celestial object to me and it in the supernova search program only where an amateur can possibly make a contribution to our understanding them. I am told that very few have ever made "positive" observations of an new supernova, but as we variable star observers know, even "negative" observations are of value. I have also read in "Sky and Telescope" of two computer-driven telescopes that scan hundreds of galaxies per night comparing the "live" images with those stored in the memory banks and being supposedly capable of detecting remarkably faint supernovae. I told Carmine Borzelli that I was interested in the supernova search of the AAVSO but that a visual observer seemed to be working against great odds when competing with a pair of computerized telescopes. Then those really clear nights have been rare, in which the observer can see at least a magnitude under the usually listed "book" magnitude, which is about magnitude 14 for my 6-inch Newtonian. Actually if you can see magnitude 14 there are multitudes of galaxies within range, indeed practically all of those listed in Becvar's "Atlas of the Heavens" (Skalnate Pleso), including the unnumbered ones.

For a serious supernova search you cannot simply look at the galaxies, for many have foreground stars. You need photographs for comparison and/or your own sketches of the galaxy and foreground stars. I like The Hubble Atlas of Galaxies, which is still available. Various books and magazines have the excellent photographs by Evered Kreimer and Dr. Vehrenberg. Starting in the May 1967 "Sky and Telescope" is the first of a series of articles on the Messier objects as photographed by Kreimer and drawn by John Mallas, using a 4-in. refractor; Mallas was a keen observer, but I feel that on a "14th magnitude night"my 6-in. and 8-in. can see more than he has sketched.

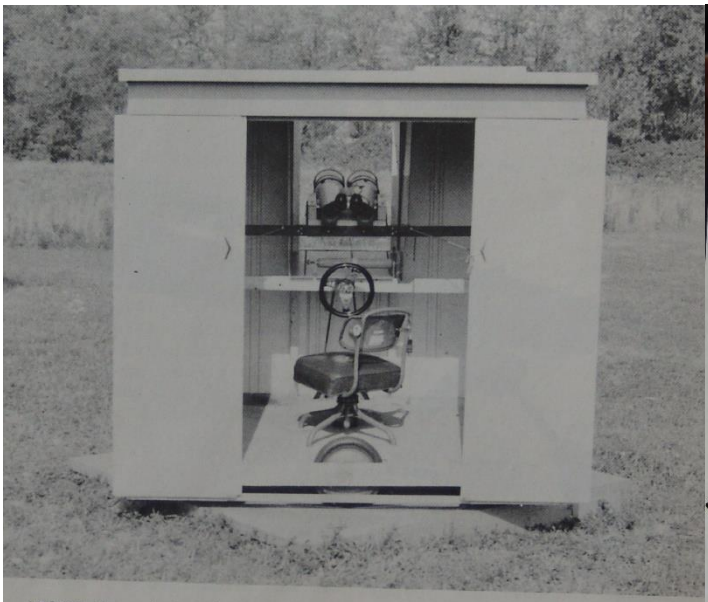
Ω

For galaxy identification you must have a good atlas and Becvar's "Atlas of the Heavens" is excellent, but a bit crowded in the Virgo area, so I prefer a splendid tour guide presented in the Feb. 1955 "Sky and Telescope", a part of "Adventuring in the Virgo Cloud" by Leland Copeland. It was this that I was using on April 18, 1979. It is truly an adventure of the mind to let the spirit travel out to the "Realm of the Galaxies" of Hubble, some 40 million light years away, while some claim the distance to be over twice that. When a clear night comes in spring I like to make that trip at least once, and if cloudy or moonlighted nights prevent it, it is a loss that I can actually feel. I need to go there. It was with my church's new pastor, David Long, who wrote an article for "Variable Views" in March of this year, that I made my first complete trip of this year, using my 8-in. Newtonian at 58x. M 100 was encountered more than half-way through the tour. It is not uncommon to see foreground stars near or superimposed on a galaxy, yet for some reason my seeing a conspicuous star in the "nebulosity" of M 100 seemed odd and stuck in my mind. I did not make any written note, but hoped I would remember to look it up later, and after completing the tour of all of the listed galaxies plus several uncharted ones we went into my house. I got out the Hubble Atlas of Galaxies and noted the absence of the star that I and the pastor had seen. Meanwhile the galaxy field had moved behind the trees from where my 8-in. was mounted, so I awaited the next night, and such a blessing for it also to be clear! At about the same time as the previous night, 9:30 p.m. EST I began again that most ethereal tour. About half-way through Pastor Long and one of his friends from Washington, D.C., Monty Koller came over to see some starry sights. Quickly I had M 100 in view and we again saw the new star, which seemed to me about the same as the previous night in appearance and about ½ magnitude brighter than the galaxy's nucleus, with both out of focus. What else could it be but a supernova?



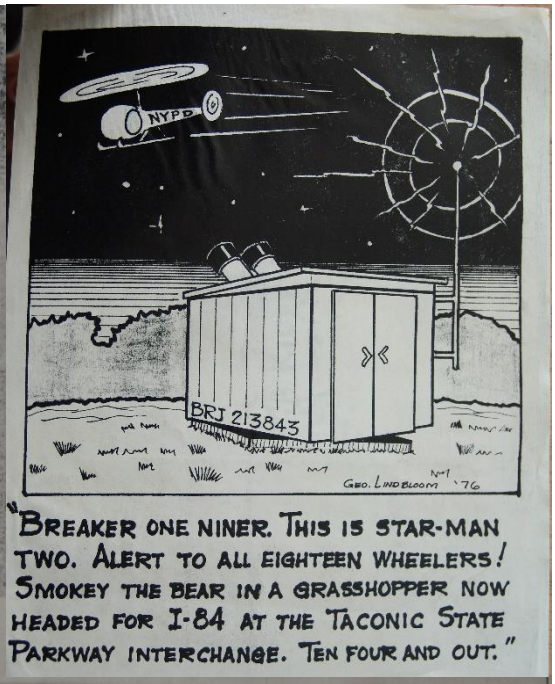
…all in good humor and all in good fun ☺ courtesy of George Lindbloom AAVSO

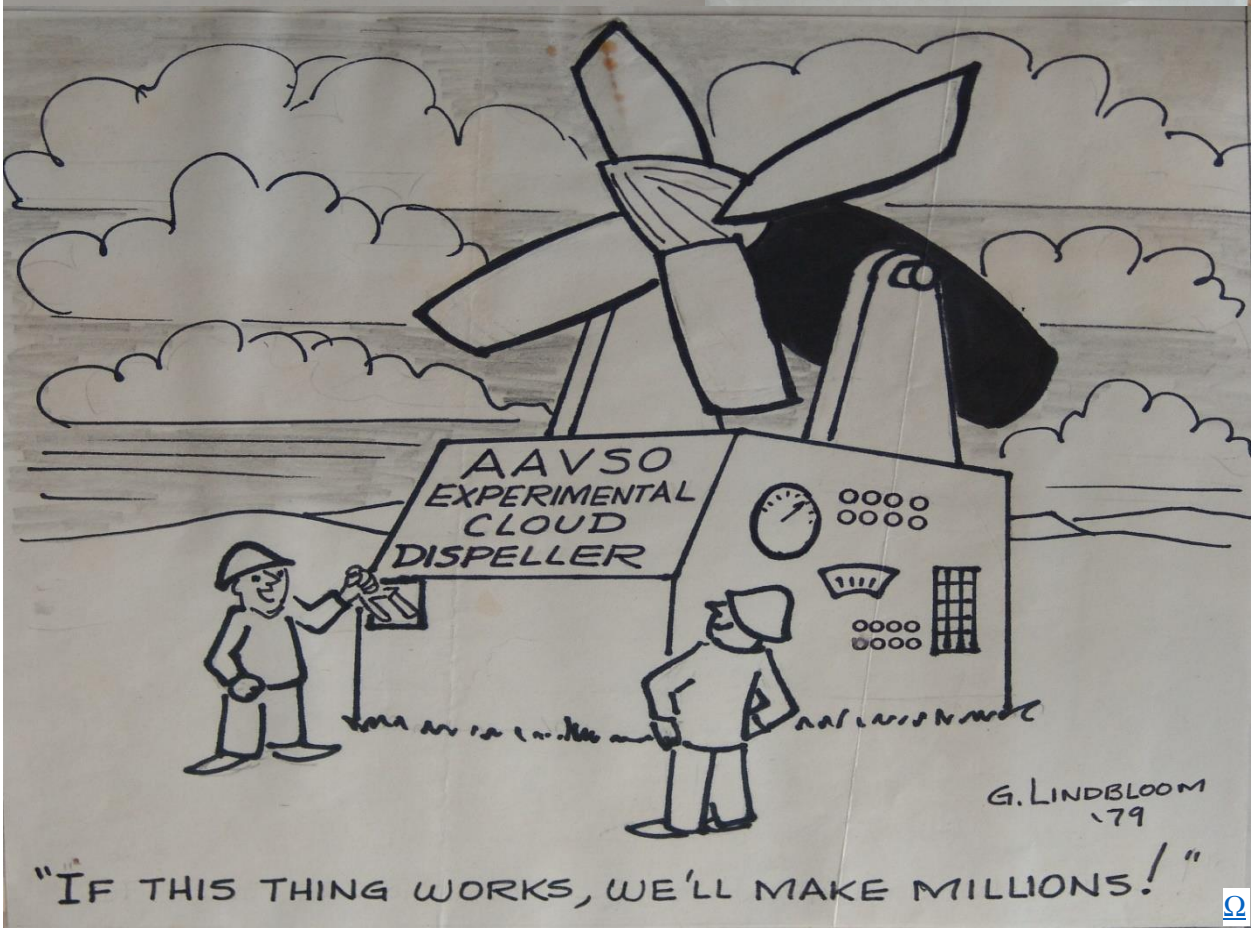
Thank you John Bortle, W. R. Brooks Observatory New York



ABOVE: The author's Peltier–type comet seeker observatory which houses a pair of 20x by 120 binoculars. All photographs with this article provided by author.

George Lindbloom's version of John's observatory





THERE are times — so many many times it seems — when you and I need to walk among the stars — to free the soul from its confinement — to strengthen and renew the spirit — to comfort the troubled heart —

How strangely beautiful it is out there among the stars — where the silence is deep and penetrating — where one can hear one's own heartbeat and know that it belongs to infinity — there are no sounds to our footsteps — only the singing of endless galaxies of stars — there are no shadows — only the twinkling of millions of lights against the curtain of the night — there are no fences to keep one out or to keep one in — there are no barriers to discourage or restrain — out there among the distant stars we shall be as free as the gentle breeze that moves unseen in the darkness —

Ω

How strange that there should be no weariness and no fatigue — no anxiety and no worry — no fear and no hatred — just an acceptance of all that is beautiful and enduring and true —

I do not need to tell you why we should walk among the stars — this you will surely understand — for we are kindred spirits — and that is why I said to you —

COME
WALK
AMONG
THE
STARS —

Ω