

Towson Professor Alex Storrs' email to Joel 3/20/12:

“The facility was named after two prominent Baltimore educators. Paul S. Watson was a well-known area astronomer, and former curator of Astronomy at the Maryland Academy of Sciences. He was also a former director of the Maryland Academy of Science’s Davis Planetarium. Thomas King was the former head of the Maryland Academy of Sciences.”

Towson Professor Jennifer Scott's email to Joel 5/1/12:

Hello again Joel,

Today I had a good conversation with one of our retired faculty members, Elmer Kreisel, about Paul Watson and I learned quite a number of things that might interest you. I am copying Elmer here so he can correct anything that I get wrong from our discussion.

First, Elmer says that Paul Watson was not a faculty member at JHU but instead taught summer courses in astronomy at Morgan State and also at JHU.

As you already know, he was curator of astronomy at the Maryland Academy of Sciences and in that capacity he gave planetarium lectures and devoted a significant amount of time each year to generating a graphic timetable of the heavens. Those used to be published in the December issues of Sky and Telescope. Elmer sent me a link to one of them:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/pecoramatta/3397722965/>

Elmer said that the decision to name our planetarium after Paul Watson and Thompson King in 1965 (the director of the MD Academy of the Sciences at that time) was based on the fact that the both did so much to advance science education in Baltimore.

Now, about the telescope. Elmer says that Paul Watson did not actually build the telescope himself.

Perhaps you know this already but it was built by Joseph Woods, who owned a machine shop in Baltimore and fabricated the mounts, drives, tubes, etc. for two identical scopes. Woods kept one and Watson had one. For both of them I believe, they modified a silo dome with a slit to house the telescopes. The optics came from The Fecker Company in Pittsburgh.

Watson's telescope was in an observatory adjacent to his house on a bluff overlooking the Magothy River. (And the creek behind his house was Black Hole Creek!)

Woods' telescope was (and may still be) in his house in Northwood in Baltimore near where Memorial Stadium was (and close to the intersection of Argonne and Loch Raven). In the days when the skies there were still dark, he did astrophotography of nebulae and galaxies.

An interesting personal fact about Paul Watson I learned is that he was deaf. He used to wear a hearing aid only so that people would know he had a hearing problem but he read lips to communicate. This meant that if you were observing with him, you'd have to shine a flashlight on your mouth so he could understand what you were saying.

Finally, Elmer also said that he and Paul both served on the committee that chose the planetarium projector at the Maryland Science Center. I sent your request to Jim O'Leary at the Maryland Science Center as well, in case he has anything to add.

Thanks for your request—the sleuthing resulted in some information that is nice for our own institutional memory. And thanks to Elmer for filling in these great details!

Jennifer

First owner built observatory in house's rooftop **A HEAVENLY HOME**

March 23, 1995 | By Frank D. Roylance | Frank D. Roylance, Sun Staff Writer

The new owners of a stone-and-stucco Tudor home in Baltimore will get four bedrooms, three baths and a window on the universe.

The house in Original Northwood is equipped with a rooftop observatory built in 1937 by Joseph L. Woods, a toy manufacturer and amateur astronomer who spent long nights in the coppered dome photographing variable stars in cooperation with Ivy League researchers. His work was once exhibited in Paris.

The house and observatory, complete with a neglected 58-year-old reflector telescope, were purchased this week for \$153,000 by Robert and Tracey Kean, who live five doors up Westview Road.

Neither is an astronomer, said Ms. Kean, but "we would want to keep the telescope with the house." Astronomy "will be a new interest."

The Keans are corporate executives. She works for MBNA America in Newark, Del., and he is with the Arundel Corp.

"We've always been fans of the houses in Northwood . . . and we have just been waiting for that house to come on the market," Ms. Kean said. "It is certainly a very unique property."

The current owner, Russell Moran, 86, is moving to smaller quarters after 35 years in the house.

The home's first owner made it a place for significant research. Mr. Woods "was particularly interested in photometry [the measurement of star brightness] and variable stars. It was serious work," said Dr. Richard Pembroke, a longtime member of the Baltimore Astronomical Society.

Variable stars dim periodically as they are eclipsed by dark companion stars; others brighten as matter from the companions falls into them. Many of the early observations were done by a network of amateurs, in conjunction with big institutions. Mr. Woods had ties to Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania.

A few other amateur astronomers in the Baltimore area built their own observatories, Dr. Pembroke said. But none was quite as grand as Mr. Woods'. All of them have since been overtaken by urbanization and increasing light pollution.

Mr. Woods was a skilled machinist and president of Winchester and Woods Inc., a maker of toy watches. He had fallen in love with astronomy as a boy, and as an adult built his first observatory in Sykesville. By 1936, however, he had tired of the long nightly drive from Baltimore. He bought the Westview Road house, at what was then the edge of urban Baltimore. Then he bought the adjoining lot and built a large, square stone addition in 1937.

It included a first-floor art studio with an 11-foot ceiling, a study and darkroom on the second floor, and the observatory on the roof.

His work in what was known as the Northwood Observatory was highly respected, and the spot became a regular meeting place for members of the Maryland Academy of Science. Mr. Woods and other members would often combine their business with pleasure.

"Woods always claimed you can't see stars without drinking a couple of beers," said Mr. Moran, a retired Armco Steel metallurgist.

Mr. Woods died in 1963, three years after he sold the house and observatory to Mr. Moran for \$33,000.

Although Mr. Woods had discouraged visitors because they interrupted his work, Mr. Moran and his wife invited scout groups NTC in to peer through their telescope and earn merit badges. For a time, he said, the city gave them a sizable property tax break in return.

Mr. Moran said he bought the place largely to indulge a lifelong fascination with astronomy. "I'm wondering all the time. I'm curious," he said. "I used to go up there [to the observatory] nightly."

Once he decided to sell, the house was on the market just four days before the Keans' successful bid came in, said Ted Stewart, agent for O'Connor, Piper & Flynn in Roland Park.

During the brief time the house was open to prospective buyers, Forrest Hamilton and two companions climbed the narrow attic stairs and pushed through the trapdoors that open up onto the observatory floor.

Mr. Hamilton is an amateur astronomer and telescope maker who earns his living as an operations specialist at the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore. He helps to command the orbiting Hubble Space Telescope.

Brushing aside cobwebs in the darkness, the visitors took their bearings with a flashlight. Then they threw open the four doors that open the rotating dome to the sky, flooding the 10-foot-wide circular room with light.

At the center stood Mr. Woods' 51-inch-long Newtonian telescope, covered by a plastic rain poncho. It was very dusty. Its brass fittings and the "equatorial" mount that allowed it to swing across the sky with the stars were badly in need of polishing and lubrication. But it all appeared fundamentally sound.

"If you like classy 'scopes, this is a nice one," Mr. Hamilton said. "It's in fairly decent shape."

[For sale: House with observatory, telescope](#)

Jamie Smith Hopkins | May 3, 2012

Here's something you don't see every day: A house that comes with its own observatory and telescope. The property, on Westview Road in Baltimore's Original Northwood neighborhood, is for sale with an asking price of \$389,000. "Stone wing c.1937 houses a vintage telescope within the beautiful copper roofed observatory," notes the listing, which calls it the Telescope House. The seller's real estate agent, JoAnn Moncure, said more than 100 people turned out for the open house last Sunday -- some who live in the area and really, really wanted a look inside.

Telescope refocuses on heavens Reborn: A restored 1927 Alvan Clark & Sons telescope is the centerpiece of a \$100,000 restoration project at the Maryland Science Center observatory.

June 30, 1998|By Frank D. Roylance | Frank D. Roylance,SUN STAFF

The starlings have been evicted, and the Maryland Science Center's long-neglected rooftop observatory in Baltimore is once again providing dramatic views of whatever stars and planets manage to shine through the city's nighttime glare.

"It's working like crazy. It's really great," said Jim O'Leary, director of the Davis Planetarium.

A \$100,000, year-long restoration of the observatory climaxed last week with the re-mounting of the science center's refurbished and updated 1927 Alvan Clark & Sons refracting telescope. Excited staffers have followed that with a series of pre-dawn tests of the system's 71-year-old optics and modern electronics.

"We had an absolutely beautiful image of the planet Jupiter, with all the banded stripes and some [cloud](#) details," O'Leary said. "We also looked at the moon, which is visible as a nice crescent at sunset. There were great craters rising out of the darkness, and mountains half in shadow and half in brightness. The moon's a very familiar thing in the sky, but through the telescope, it makes me go, 'Wow!' "

Further tests and staff training should be finished by Aug. 26, officials say. By September, science center visitors should be getting a good look at the sun, moon, galaxies, bright stars and planets.

City smog and bright lights blot out most of the night sky. "If you were a professional astronomer doing Ph.D research, you would be out of your mind" to mount a telescope in Baltimore, O'Leary said.

"But we're not doing any research here," he said. "We're looking at things that are visible all the time. And here, we've got the location, the crowds are coming and we need to take advantage of it."

Those who can't climb the 25 steps to the dome, and groups that can't fit onto its 20-foot-diameter observing floor, will be able to watch via live TV links to the planetarium downstairs. The 8-inch diameter telescope was purchased by the Maryland Academy of Sciences in 1927 for \$1,500. For many years it was a popular attraction for Baltimoreans who climbed to the roof of the Enoch Pratt Free Library's main branch.

But in the 1950s, its 10-foot tube, glass lenses, brass fittings and knobs were put into storage. Joe Halley ("like the comet"), chief technician for the planetarium, first encountered the telescope in a storefront storage room on Howard Street.

"It was actually laying on the floor in a million pieces. It had been taken apart by a Boy Scout troop," he said. He restored it, and in 1980 installed it in the observatory of the Inner Harbor's then-new Maryland Science Center.

Visitors and staff alike used to troop up to the dome for a look at the sky and other attractions. "We used to watch the peregrine falcons on the USF&G building," Halley said, "and I first saw Mars through this telescope."

But access to the dome was limited and, as a consequence, it fell into disuse. Rust and nesting materials left by generations of starlings jammed the rollers vital to the movement of both the dome and its hand-cranked sliding doors. By 1990, the dome was inoperable.

The observatory needed an angel. Last year it found two in Monica and Richard Coleman, natural history enthusiasts from Pasadena who donated the \$100,000 for its restoration.

At first, science center officials debated whether to salvage or replace the old Alvan Clark telescope. After all, many amateurs today have more powerful instruments in their back yards.

But the telescope was "the sentimental favorite," Halley said.

It is powerful enough for the bright objects visible from downtown Baltimore. And best of all, it looks the way people expect it to look -- a long tube with lots of brass.

Alvan Clark and his son, Alvan Graham Clark, of Cambridge, Mass., were among the nation's premier telescope manufacturers in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Their instruments remain in use at many observatories around the country.

All are refractors, meaning they use glass lenses rather than mirrors to collect and focus the light from stars and planets. And Clarks came in all sizes.

"They made the two largest telescopes of this type," O'Leary said. The biggest -- a 40-inch diameter refractor -- is still used at the University of Chicago's Yerkes Observatory in Wisconsin.

Magnifying power

The diameter of the glass lens determines how much light can enter the telescope, and how much detail can be seen. Its magnifying power depends on which eyepiece lens its operators choose to install.

The science center's telescope has an 8-inch lens at the far end of its 10-foot tube. A selection of new eyepieces has been acquired for the near end.

Most of the time, O'Leary said, the telescope will be operated at low to medium magnification. That's plenty for the sun, the moon, planets and any comets that cross Baltimore's sky.

Restoring the observatory required both functional and cosmetic repairs.

On the roof, the dome was cleaned and lubricated; the observing room was carpeted, furnished and wired for modern electronics.