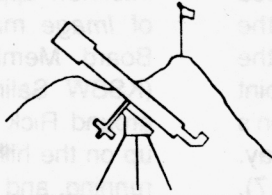


# THE FREMONT PEAK OBSERVER



Vol. II No. 6

December 1986

## HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

Normally the *Observer* is published quarterly, but Denni Medlock had written such a great article on the Dedication that I went ahead and put out a special Holiday edition to feature it. For those who were there that day, I'm sure the article will bring back some fond memories. For those who were unable to attend, I hope you have a chance in the near future to visit your Observatory.

*Frank Dibbell*

## FIRST LIGHT & DEDICATION

*by Denni Medlock*

Arriving as early as we can, we are nevertheless greeted by a multitude of now familiar vehicles parked behind Ranger Rick's house at the Peak. After setting up a quick camp Kevin and I begin the walk up the hill to the Observatory amid the sounds of industrious hammers and saws. It is Friday, August 29th. Tomorrow is Dedication Day, and the crew is hard at work.

The building looks marvelous! It is difficult to believe that only five months ago the site was still inhabited by brush, weeds, and an occasional lizard. Today stands a cedar-shingled building that sets beautifully into its surroundings. The triangular roll-off roof gives the Observatory an air of gracefulness for all of its function. Knowing the story of its design by architect Morgan Smith, I smile at seeing the Observatory which a few months ago was no more than a set of blueprints on my dining room table.

Kevin and I say hello to the crew, as always surprised by the energy we see going into the work around us. Or is it simply that Dedication Day is tomorrow, and there are many things left to do?

Someone jokes about how clean the windows in the meeting room are. Easy enough to see when you realize there is no glass in the 48 panes, nor is there likely to be for a few more weeks. We look about and identify just about everyone there: Donn Mukensnoble building stairs for the drop between the two rooms,

Charlie Carlson (our Foreman) running about making sure things are getting done right, Skip Whitworth, John Gleason, Don Stone, Carter Roberts, Frank Dibbell, Bob Fingerhut and John Stuart doing the myriad little details that need to be done before the Big Day. Time to reflect back on work weekends past: the first concrete pour in April during a rainstorm that started when the first truck arrived and stopped when the last one left; the hot summer afternoons when you couldn't get anyone to work on the roof; the one section of cedar shingles that had to be done twice. And of course, John Stuart will be glad to tell you why the insulation in the meeting room had to be put up three times!

Mike Maloon and friend Chris are perched precariously on the top of the roll-off roof. This is the first time for both of them at the Observatory, yet single-handedly they complete the shingling of the roof in time for the dedication.

In the Observing Room the *Beast* sleeps. I gave the 30-inch that name when it lived in my garage. All of our telescopes have names. Tonight it will see *first light*, and tomorrow it will be given another name.

Evening settles and it's a perfect night for observing. There is a definite sense of anticipation in the group camped behind Ranger Rick's house as darkness comes. Questions banter about. "What will be the 30-inch's first object?" Kevin and I laugh. All of Kevin's scopes have had one thing in common: The Orion Nebula has been the first object they have seen. But this is late August, and Orion won't be up until well after midnight. We just shrug as we begin our walk up the hill amidst the calls of the well-wishers.

Kevin and I (plus our little ones Megan and Paul) make the trip by ourselves. The 30-inch is our baby. Glass, steel, aluminum, and ideas had come together piece by piece over a five year period, resulting in this mammoth instrument before us. We have asked for *first light* to be ours alone, knowing that we will probably never have it alone to ourselves ever again. The request was understood and agreed to by all who were there. Kevin and I are laughing with nervous excitement. No matter how well a mirror shows under the Everett Scale or Ronchi test, the true challenge is always the sky.

For lack of a better object we turn the 30-inch on

Saturn. Big, bright and in focus. The planet looks like any other view of it as seen through other fair-sized instruments. It isn't until we move the scope onto the Lagoon Nebula do we get an idea of just how good the mirror is, and its field of view. Excited at the pinpoint star images and the hint of color in the Lagoon's nebulosity, we move into the Southern Milky Way. One of my favorite objects is the Swan Nebula (M17), and what you see is a direct function of the aperture of your instrument. It looks just like a textbook astrophoto, and appears quite bright. This is what aperture is all about! We view until I am forced to walk two sleepy kids down the hill to bed. I leave reluctantly, but I am buoyed by the 30-inch's performance. It is ready.

At the foot of the hill a quiet but anxious group waits in the dark. "How was it?" they ask. "Spectacular!" is my reply. "Go on up." And with those three words the 30-inch is no longer ours.

Saturday dawns sunny and clear, a perfect day for the dedication. It's a casual workday, getting last minute items done. Garbage cans filled with empty soft-drink cans get hauled down the hill by Rick and Debra Morales. Later, loads of scrap lumber are moved. Down by the tool shed the barbecue fixin's are put into place. The scene is readied for the FPOA's annual General Membership Meeting.

People begin to arrive. By 3:00 PM over one hundred have gathered at the Observatory, many seeing it for the first time. News reporters and State V.I.P.s mingle with members and guests before the ceremony begins. Association President Bob Fingerhut and Association Executive Secretary Rick Morales highlight the achievements of the past two years, and of things yet to come. I manage to get volunteered to christen the Observatory with a bottle of Mirassou "Comet" Champagne. The bottle doesn't break on the first swing; rather it puts a dent in the wooden support beam of the south wall! The bottle breaks on a successful second try, and I dedicate Fremont Peak Observatory and officially name the 30-inch "Challenger".

The celebration begins. Many move down the hill to participate in the barbecue, view the continuous slide show in the tool shed, or vote in the annual election. Some stay at the Observatory to admire the handiwork and mingle. District Ranger Harry Batlin asks if they can have Ranger Rick (our Executive Secretary, Rick Morales) back now. "I hear he's gone native" comments Harry's boss from Monterey. "Yes, he even married one of us!" I add in passing.

Evening comes quickly, and with it a line of about 50 forms to gaze into the eyepiece of the 30-inch. Kevin is kept busy placing the 30-inch on different objects throughout the evening while answering the questions

of a reporter from the *San Francisco Chronicle* (the interview appears in the Sunday, November 2nd issue of *Image* magazine). An interview done earlier with Board Member John Gleason airs on Channel 8 (KSBW Salinas) TV, watched by a crowd gathered around Rick and Debra's television. The atmosphere up on the hill is one of jubilant triumph. We are up and running, and boy, did we do well!

The rising sun on Sunday morning is greeted by the sleepy eyes and yawns of those who stayed and observed all night. Sometime during the previous evening an aide to State Senator Mello arrived and presented us with a beautifully done plaque commemorating the dedication of the Observatory as stated in a special resolution brought before the California State Senate. Even though it arrived too late for the actual dedication ceremony, we feel the pride and sense of accomplishment the plaque has brought us.

Reluctantly, we clean up the site, pack our camp and the kids, and prepare to head home. As I do I look up the hill to see Kevin walking down from the Observatory one last time. He stops and looks back, gazing at the telescope poking its yellow tube up through the still rolled off roof. I know what he is thinking. He doesn't want to leave the telescope yet knows he has to; it now belongs to Fremont Peak. Five years of dreaming, planning, and building are essentially over. As Kevin turns to resume his descent from the hill, he is smiling.

---

The purpose of the *Fremont Peak Observatory Association* is to provide educational and interpretive services of astronomically related topics to visitors of Fremont Peak State Park. The *Fremont Peak Observer* is published quarterly, and is the official publication of the *Fremont Peak Observatory Association*. Articles and other items for publication should be sent to:

Frank Dibbell, FPOA  
710 Georgia Avenue  
Sunnyvale, CA 94086

Deadline for articles is the 15th of the month preceding the month of publication.

---

#### FPOA OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

President:	Robert Fingerhut	(408) 263-4455
Vice Pres:	Robert Schalck	(415) 782-1537
Exec Sec.:	Rick Morales	(408) 623-4255
Admn Sec.:	Denni Medlock	(415) 654-6796
Treasurer:	John Stewart	(415) 527-7036
Directors:	Frank Dibbell	(408) 735-9597
	John Gleason	(415) 790-9250
	Kevin Medlock	(415) 654-6796
	Howard Medlock	(415) 276-2753