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The History of Astronomy Collection in the Adler Planetarium and Astronomy Museum at Chicago, Illinois

By Bruce Stephenson, Chicago

Purpose

The historical collection at the Adler Planetarium and Astronomy Museum was created in order to educate visitors about the tools of astronomy and its related sciences, to generate interest in the history of science, to provide a comprehensive resource for scholarly research, and to preserve historically and artistically important scientific artifacts.

History

Chicago businessman Max Adler founded the Adler Planetarium and Astronomy Museum in 1930 in hopes that "the youth of our city, and indeed of other cities, may through this dramatization [i.e., the Zeiss planetarium] find new interests and fresh inspiration and also that with the aid of the Planetarium and Astronomical Museum, science may be advanced." In addition to the Planetarium itself, Mr. Adler donated its first collection, a set of about 500 astronomical, navigational and mathematical instruments purchased from Dutch dealer Antoine W. M. Mensing. Since its creation, the history of astronomy collection has grown to almost 2000 antique instruments, making it the third largest collection of scientific artifacts in the world and the largest in the western hemisphere. The collection holdings also include a modern library for the history of astronomy, a substantial rare book library, and an extensive collection of other astronomical works on paper.

Collections

The Adler's Antique Instrument collection contains almost 2000 artifacts dating from the 12th through the 20th centuries, ranging from medieval sundials and armillary spheres to Scientific Revolution planetaria and telescopes to modern optical and navigational equipment. Although the collection contains examples of almost every type of astronomical instrument, it represents one of the most important collections of:

- astrolabes
- celestial globes
- planetaria
- sundials
- telescopes
- armillary spheres
- mathematical instruments

The Adler's collections of rare books and works on paper also offer an extensive historical resource. The Rare Book Collection, numbering around 2500 printed and manuscript titles, includes early works on instrument makers and manufacturing; astronomical and cosmological texts and tables; celestial atlases and star charts; treatises on mathematics and its practical applications; works on optics, physics, astrology, geography and navigation; and early encyclopedias and dictionaries. The Works on Paper collection contains about 350 individual maps, prints, portraits, pamphlets and broadsides, including a large number of early printed comet broadsides.

Exhibits

The antique instrument and works on paper collections are displayed in several of the Planetarium's exhibits. A recently opened exhibit explores medieval astronomy from the European and Islamic worlds, with an emphasis on astrolabes, sundials, and armillary spheres. Other permanent exhibits investigate topics such as early and modern navigation and Herschel's discovery of Uranus. Temporary exhibits have presented parts of the collection while exploring the eighteenth century revolution in measurement, early American surveying, Galileo's telescopes, and Babylonian astronomy.

Access to the Collection

Scholars and other visitors may request access to the collection by contacting the History of Astronomy Department. Visits may be made to the department weekdays from 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., and the exhibits are open daily. Visitors may also purchase photographs, slides and transparencies of the instruments as well as photographs, slides and xeroxes of many of the works on paper. The department's curatorial and collections staff also welcome inquiries about the collections and the history of astronomy.

For more information, please contact:

Bruce Stephenson, Ph.D., Director
(E-mail: cbs3@midway.uchicago.edu)
Roderick and Marjorie Webster, Curators Emeriti
Kate Desulis, Collections Manager
(E-mail: kdesulis@midway.uchicago.edu)

Department of the History of Astronomy
Adler Planetarium
1300 South Lake Shore Drive
Chicago, IL 60605, USA
(312) 322-0594 phone
(312) 322-2257 fax
URL: <http://astro.uchicago.edu/adler/>

Ehrung für Wilhelm Foerster

Aus Anlaß des 75. Todestages von Wilhelm Foerster (1832 - 1921), dem langjährigen Direktor der Berliner Sternwarte und bedeutenden Wissenschaftsorganisator, fand am 18. Januar 1996 auf dem Bornimer Friedhof in Potsdam eine kleine Gedenkveranstaltung statt. Daran nahmen Vertreter der Wilhelm-Foerster-Sternwarte Berlin, der URANIA Berlin e.V., des Urania-Vereins "Wilhelm Foerster" Potsdam e.V., des Astrophysikalischen Instituts Potsdam sowie die Enkelin Marianne Foerster teil.

Ehrung für W. G. Lohrmann

Von Siegfried Koge, Dresden

An einer Feierstunde anlässlich des 200. Geburtstages von Wilhelm Gotthelf Lohrmann (1796 - 1840) am 31. Januar 1996 im Mathematisch-Physikalischen Salon Dresden, bei der gleichzeitig eine Sonderausstellung eröffnet wurde (*siehe S. 3*), nahmen Vertreter des Lohrmann-Club e.V., der Technischen Universität Dresden, des Sächsischen Staatsministeriums für Kultur und Wissenschaft, von Museen sowie über 40 Nachkommen Lohrmanns teil. Die Referenten würdigten die wissenschaftlichen Leistungen des in Dresden Geborenen als Geodät (Vermessung u. a. von Sachsen, dessen Flüsse und der Strecke für die erste deutsche Fernreisebahn Leipzig-Dresden), als Astronom, Lehrer (1828 Mitbegründer der Technischen Bildungsanstalten, heute TU Dresden), Förderer von Gewerbe und entstehender Industrie sowie als Oberinspektor des Mathematisch-Physikalischen Salons (ab 1827). Der Geodät Lohrmann benötigte die Positions-astronomie zur Bestimmung der Koordinaten seiner Beobachtungspunkte und der Nordrichtung. Daneben richtete er sich eine Privatsternwarte ein, auf der er Kometen und Meteore, besonders aber den Mond beobachtete. 1836 vollendete er die Beobachtungen für seine *Topographie der sichtbaren Mondoberfläche*, einer Mondkarte in 25 Sektionen, von der aber zu Lebzeiten nur ein Teil erschien. Erst 1878 gab J. F. Julius Schmidt das gesamte Werk heraus.

Literatur: Arthur Weichold, *Wilhelm Gotthelf Lohrmann*, Leipzig: J. A. Barth 1985, 483 S. (*im Salon zum Sonderpreis von 20 DM erhältlich*)

Ergänzung d. Red.: Ebenfalls am 31. 1. hielt Prof. Dr. M. Soffel (Lohrmann-Observatorium der TU Dresden) zu Ehren von Lohrmann an der TU einen Vortrag über Mondforschung.